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THE ART AND PRACTICE OF HISTORICAL FICTION

BY ALFRED TRESIDDER SHEPPARD

THE RED CRAVAT
RUNNING HORSE INN
THE RISE OF LEDGAR DUNSTAN
THE QUEST OF LEDGAR DUNSTAN
A SON OF THE MANSE
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JUDAS ISCARIOT
BRAVE EARTH
HERE COMES AN OLD SAILOR
QUEEN DICK
TUCK OF DRUM AND OTHER STORIES
THE BIBLE IN IRELAND. By ASENATH NICHOLSON. Edited with an Introduction by ALFRED TRESIDDER SHEPPARD.
THE ART AND PRACTICE OF HISTORICAL FICTION

THE ART & PRACTICE *of* HISTORICAL FICTION

By Alfred Tresidder Sheppard

1930

HUMPHREY TOULMIN LONDON

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DEDICATION

To you who snatch Time's glass
From his destroying hand,
And, turning it, let pass
The centuries of sand

Making our ears the shells
For rumours from afar,
The voices, footfalls, bells,
Where silences now are,

Lighting before our eyes
Lamps, candles, torches, pyres,
Where heaped-up darkness lies
Round embers of old fires—

I bring this book to you,
Who find our Past again,
And people it anew
With all that Time has slain.

ALFRED TRESIDDER SHEPPARD.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	SOME DEFINITIONS	9
II.	VERB. SAP.	18
III.	THE PALACE OF HISTORY	29
IV.	THE KING OF THE ROMANTICS	42
V.	FROM SCOTT TO SHORTHOUSE	56
VI.	STEVENSON AND AFTER	67
VII.	THE GERM AND THE PLOT	81
VIII.	SOME NOVELISTS AT WORK	95
IX.	THE CHOICE OF PERIOD	111
X.	GOING FOREIGN	135
XI.	MISTAKES OF HISTORY AND OF FICTION	152
XII.	THE READING AND THE WRITING	172
XIII.	"A NUMBER OF THINGS"	193
XIV.	DIALOGUE AND DIALECT	211
XV.	CHARACTERS	229
XVI.	NAMES AND TITLES	251
XVII.	THE SHORT STORY	256
XVIII.	THE FUTURE OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL	267
XIX.	"A GREAT ROW AND SHINDY"	278
XX.	A LITTLE WASTE OF TIME	290
	INDEX	293

THE ART AND PRACTICE OF HISTORICAL FICTION

I.—SOME DEFINITIONS

"Hang it . . . why do you set me defining?"—OUIDA: *Held in Bondage.*

I

ON a bridge spanning Arno, one could see in the ever-moving crowd three Italies. There were Franciscans in their brown habits, cord girdles, swinging crucifixes, sandals. A splash of scarlet showed a straggler from the great days of Garibaldi. Young Fascisti in their black shirts thronged the platform of an electric tram that clanged its way past slow-moving country carts drawn by horses, mules, asses, sometimes housed in flaming colour.

In the room from which I watched, an elderly Italian, who spoke six languages and knew almost every country in the world, discussed philosophies of life. "The finest I remember," he said to me, "was written in a paragraph by Metastasio." I have lost the scrap of paper on which he wrote, in Italian, words which may be roughly translated thus: "Life consists of the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Past is over and is nothing; the Future has not come and may not come and is nothing; the Present is the little point of time on which we stand. Therefore Life is the Past, which is nothing, and the Future, which is nothing, and the little point of time on which we stand."

Pietro Trapassi—whom the world knows as Metastasio—was one of the most brilliant poets and playwrights of the eighteenth century. He was the son of a soldier in the Corsican Regiment of the Papal Army in Rome; he picked up a living by improvising verses for coppers in the streets;

he was noticed, adopted, and educated by a lawyer of some eminence; at twelve he translated the Iliad, and at fourteen he wrote his first play.

But not Metastasio nor anyone else has summed up all life in a paragraph. If the Past is nothing, he would not have amused the world with plays some of which are the wildest travesties of history. Without the Past, the Historical Drama and the Historical Novel would have no interest, no use, and no meaning. And here is perhaps the nearest approach I can make to definition.

It seems to me that some attempt should be made, at the very beginning, to state what the term "Historical Fiction" connotes in this book; necessity has "set me defining." A great educationalist has said that nine-tenths of the difficulties of humanity arise from a wrong use or a wrong understanding of words. At least clear definitions at the outset remove obstacles to understanding. Suppose, for instance, a subject like vivisection is to be debated. To one, it suggests knives carving agonized flesh and nerve; to another, needle-pricks, injections, bacilli and bacteriophage at work. Or if one discusses whether education is productive of human happiness—what *is* education? What *is* happiness? We speak of something as "good" assuming that "good" is universally understood; yet Lowes Dickinson has written a whole volume about that one short word and its connotation—"The Meaning of Good"—and, for the matter of that, Davidson a whole volume on "The Logic of Definition." Euclid, twenty-two centuries ago, began a work which has been the bane of countless generations of schoolboys (though Einstein has come at last to their help) with a string of definitions which seem at first sight the alpha and omega of clarity and compression; concise, with no purple patches and "no flowers"; quite beyond question or challenge. . . . Wait a moment. The renowned Dr. Dionysius Lardner *did* challenge them; in his once-famous edition he said, "These definitions require

some elucidation," and called one "objectionable and unintelligible," and another "useless."

Words even in what is supposed to be the same language convey totally different meanings to different men. Ask an Englishman what a "blind pig" or a "blind tiger" is. Obviously a pig or a tiger deprived of sight. To an American, the words suggest places where alcoholic drinks can be obtained; there were, by the way, blind ale-stakes in an earlier England. Even a tiny mark, or the slight inflection of a voice, may make all the difference. I heard a speaker (an historical novelist) remark once on the significance of a note of exclamation or interrogation, giving as an instance, "Politicians always speak the truth" . . . "Politicians always speak the truth?" . . . "Politicians *always* speak the truth!"

Then, with the centuries, words change their meanings. To a man of the Middle Ages, a clerk whose father was an old pagan and whose brother a young villain might mean only a clergyman whose father lived in the country and whose brother worked on an allotment. To "upset" meant to put in order. A novel was at first "something new." James the First, in explaining to the people of England that his own faith was the only true and sensible faith, referred contemptuously to "the religion of the novelists"—not that of writers of fiction, but of those who held novel ideas. The word "advertise" in the Book of Ruth and in "The Castle of Otranto" is not the "advertise" of today. Some time back I was amused, in the modern and the earlier sense, to find an eminent journalist expressing, in a long article contributed to a leading literary review, his amazement and amusement because a Tudor writer had described Swiss mountains as "amusing." But the writer on whom he commented saw nothing laughable in the Alpine heights; his sensations were rather of bewilderment, terror, disapprobation (because the Tudor mind rarely saw beauty in a chaos of rock and ice), and he was set "a-musing."

This word has changed its meaning more than once; when Nelson spoke of the French fleet amusing ours, he used the word in the sense of deceiving and leading astray.

II

It is not difficult to define fiction; the definition of historical fiction, on the other hand, presents innumerable, and at first unsuspected, difficulties. Augustine Birrell in one of his essays has pointed out that "history" and "story" were originally the same, and were derived from a Greek source signifying information obtained by enquiry. "The natural definition of history, therefore," he continues, "surely is the story of man upon earth, and the historian is he who tells us any chapter or fragment of that story." Yet "surely," to my mind, the moment any chapter or fragment of that story wanders by a hair's breadth from exact and established fact, the historian ceases to be historian, and becomes an historical novelist—unless, indeed, he becomes philosopher, theologian, or prophet; "a prophet with his face turned backwards," in the words of Von Schlegel. The problem is not unlike that of Shylock; faced with Portia's injunction to take his pound of flesh—and nothing more. It cannot be evaded as Macaulay attempted to evade it when he said: "Facts are the mere dross of history." Facts relating to the past *are* history, and the historian who steps beyond them steps into foreign land. A History of the United States was once written with the express intention of proving that God was an American God, although, as Mark Twain has carefully pointed out in "The Prince and the Pauper," Latimer at the birth of the boy who was to become King Edward VI. wrote enthusiastically to Cromwell that God had "verely shoyd Hym selff Gode of Inglonde, or rather an Inglyssh God, yf we consydyr and pondyr welle alle Hys proceedynges with us from tyme to tyme." Gibbon, the

greatest of all historians (in spite of the challenge to his accuracy by Bury and other later writers) devoted one famous chapter to an attack on Christianity. Macaulay used his "dross of history" to support his political views. Froude, Carlyle, and many other historians have employed, distorted, and even invented facts to prove a case. At one time there was a controversy among historians as to whether Carlyle should be accepted seriously as one of their number or regarded merely as a writer of fiction.

No doubt there are historians more readable than Stubbs; and the chroniclers, from Bede onwards, have mingled facts with fiction; fiction, however, in which the older chroniclers themselves (living in a world where the miraculous was homespun truth) firmly and honestly believed. But the mistakes of history, with some of which I shall deal later, and the conclusions drawn from the facts of history, are responsible for the attitude towards that science of so many eminent men. "The motives for falsifying history," says Dean Inge, "are in exact proportion to the interest of posterity in knowing the truth. Falsified history has perhaps had more influence than true history." Abraham Lincoln, though a great reader, was suspicious of history and rarely read it. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote once: "I am reading an idle tale, and am very glad it is not metaphysics to puzzle my judgment, or history to mislead my opinion." Sir Robert Walpole told his son to "read anything but history, for history must be false." Lord Chesterfield said "History is only a confused heap of facts." Carlyle, who had a great deal to say, much of it contradictory, on this subject, has told us that it is the essence of innumerable Biographies; a distillation of rumours; the letter of Instructions which the old generations write and posthumously transmit to the new" (but how bad their writing sometimes is!) and that even song books and treatises on mathematics are historical documents; he reminds us also that Clio, the Muse of History, is the

daughter of Memory.* In the "Palace of Pleasure" (1565) William Painter spoke of "histories which by another term I call novels." Lord Plunkett called history an old almanac, and Dr. Johnson described historians as almanac-makers. Landor said that perhaps the most accurate and faithful historian would never write as much truth as untruth. Sir Thomas Browne was impatient of the records of history, which, he said, set down things that ought never to have been done, or never to have been known.

Thucydides as a boy wept on hearing Herodotus read his history; for different reasons, many reputed historians might draw different tears. In one sentence, though it convicts him of imperfection, Macaulay gives a hint at the ideal history: "The perfect historian," he writes, "must possess an imagination sufficiently powerful to make his narrative affecting and picturesque; yet he must control it so absolutely as to content himself with the materials which he finds, and to refrain from supplying deficiencies by additions of his own. He must be a profound and ingenious reasoner; yet he must possess sufficient self-command to abstain from casting the facts in the mould of his hypothesis." But has not Cervantes, an historical novelist or very nearly one, in his eminently wise book summed up all this?

"History is like sacred writing, because truth is essential to it—nevertheless there are many who think that books may be written and tossed out into the world like fritters."

"*Now what I want is Facts—Stick to Facts, Sir!*" said Mr. Gradgrind.

III

Ruskin has given us a working definition of Fiction proper: "A feigned, fictitious, artificial, supernatural, put-together-out-of-one's-head thing." Historical Fiction, then, is a blend of Mr. Gradgrind's facts and Ruskin's "put-together-out-of-one's-head thing." In attempting to define

* "Memory is the thing we forget with" (Old Saying).

it (but is any complete definition possible?) one might begin by substituting the words "Historical Fiction" for "History" in Anatole France's saying, "History is an art and should be written with imagination." Historical Fiction deals imaginatively with the Past and can follow paths where Trespass Boards confront the pedestrian historian. The novelist has a wider range; he may set foot in the preserves of history, but on one condition: he may not make his habitation there, or may only build if part of his house stands within the demesne of the imagination.

I have suggested that the first approach to definition must recognize the Past; an historical novel must of necessity be a story of the past in which imagination comes to the aid of fact. John Buchan has said that an historical novel is simply a novel which attempts to reconstruct the life, and recapture the atmosphere, of an age other than that of the writer. "The age," he adds, "may be distant a couple of generations, or a thousand years." Mr. Jonathan Nield offers us a definition: "A Novel is rendered historical by the introduction of dates, personages, or events, to which identification can be readily given."* Both of these seem to me on the whole good working definitions, though the last is challenged by Mr. Arnold Bennett who, describing it as "bizarre," since it includes novels like "Roderick Random," considers that the first thing about an historical novel is that the author re-creates in it an age in which he did *not* live. G. M. Trevelyan adds to the historical novel proper another class: the novel of contemporary manners, which acquires historical value only by the passage of time. But two minutes ago is, strictly speaking, as much the Past as two generations or two thousand years; and in that sense it is (I think) difficult to draw any exact line and rule out any novel except those of the class which includes Bellamy's "Looking Backward," Butler's "Erewhon,"

* *The Library Review* (No. 12) contains an article by Mr. Nield in which definitions are discussed.

Lytton's " The Coming Race," and some of the imaginative work of Wells and Jules Verne.

" An age other than that of the writer "—" an age in which the writer did *not* live "—Mr. Bennett follows very closely Colonel Buchan's earlier definition—presents many problems. " The She-Wolves of Machecoul," for instance, by Alexandre Dumas, deals with half a century or so of French history, between the years 1795 and 1843. Dumas was born in 1803, so that he was living during forty years of this period, but born eight years after the date at which his story opens. Tolstoy's " Sevastopol " by these definitions is not an historical novel; his " War and Peace " just succeeds in being so, as he was born eight years after the date at which the story closes. In the case of collaboration, such as that of Besant and Rice, Emile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian, Paul and Victor Margueritte, or (for the matter of that) Dumas himself and Maquet, La Croix, or any other of his many " devils," it might be quite impossible owing to the differences in ages to say which parts were historical fiction and which were not. Arnold Bennett, born in 1867, could obviously not write an historical novel about the Franco-German War, though John Buchan, born in 1875, could do so. A younger writer, like Lion Feuchtwanger, could select a period forbidden both to Arnold Bennett and to John Buchan.

An attempt to fix a certain number of years was made by Leslie Stephen; he suggested sixty years back, basing his period of elapsed time on the " 'Tis Sixty Years Since," which was the second title of " Waverley." (But as a matter of fact, Scott's original sub-title was " 'Tis Fifty Years Since," which was altered to suit the date of publication.) Perhaps if any time must be chosen half a century is a useful choice. Fifty years sees the young grown old, the middle-aged and old vanished from the scene. Fashions, costumes, habits, systems have passed and altered; death and change have cast their glamour and the haze of distance

over a by-gone day. I was once shown by an archæologist a collection of prehistoric celts with which were mingled two or three extremely clever forgeries; they had deceived many of the experts. I could see no difference, and asked how the spurious had been detected. "If you look very closely," I was told, "you may see a kind of film on the real which is missing on the fabrications. This cannot be imitated. Time, and only time, can give it."

I do not know any definition complete and unassailable at every point, unless one defines by negatives, as Addison said wit was defined by Cowley, and nonsense defined in "Hudibras." Some fiction may be classified as historical without possibility of challenge. There is no question about Scott, Dumas, Ainsworth, Lytton, Hugo, Bernard Capes, Henty, Hewlett, Manzoni, Merezhkovsky, Jókai, Sabatini, or Mary Johnston. Cervantes, Bunyan, Defoe, Lever are placed less easily, like Smollett, Fielding, and especially the romantic writers immediately preceding and succeeding Scott. The really great historical novelists, it seems to me, are those who invest and surround their characters—the men and women "of lost years"—with the haze of wistfulness and glamour which is comparable to that gloss or film on pre-historic implements and weapons; time's own work, not to be copied by any human tool or process. Friedrich Spielhagen, the German novelist, whose books come on the uncertain border-line, says in his "Technik des Romans" that the historical novel is one that portrays a time on which the light of the living generation's memory does not fall any longer in its full force—"dieses Licht (der Erinnerung der jetzigen Generation) nicht mehr vollkräftig fällt." This, I fancy, is the nearest approach to a solution of the difficulty. We may write about an age in which we have lived when it becomes shrouded in the blue haze of distance; entering it, we tread softly in the Enchanted Garden of youth, our own dead youth and the world's.

II.—VERB. SAP.

FANTASTIC: Then you have made an end of your tale, gammer?

MADGE: Yes, faith; when this was done, I took a piece of bread and cheese, and came my way.—GEORGE PEELE (*c.* 1592): *The Old Wives' Tale.*

I

I HAVE set this fragment from "The Old Wives' Tale" at the chapter-head to be a warning-signal on a dangerous road. Part, and indeed a great part, of the intention of this book is to afford such help as I may to those anxious to attempt historical fiction. It would be unfair to encourage travellers without pointing out the difficulties of the way. A casual enquiry a year or so back about a certain correspondence course in the art of writing fiction brings me (and bids fair to bring me to my life's end) a budget at frequent intervals imploring me to learn to write; telling me how easy a matter it is under proper tuition; asking me if I am too shy to venture; assuring me that by neglecting the opportunities offered I am probably tossing aside a facile competence, or a fortune. But an uncomfortable recollection of a conversation between Alexandre Dumas and a friend flashes across my mind.

"I can't think what is wanting to make So-and-So a man of talent," Dumas, the most generous of men, asked about another writer.

"Possibly it is the talent he wants," it was suggested.

"*Tiens!* That's true! I never thought of that."

Froude said that fiction, unless it was the best in its kind, was best unwritten.

The post brings me, as I suppose it brings to all novelists who have published several books, the most curious and

even pathetic letters from would-be authors who have been tempted by the phenomenal success of novels like "If Winter Comes," "The Green Hat," "All Quiet on the Western Front," "Jew Süss," or "The Bridge of San Luis Rey." In spite of popular ideas based on Anthony Trollope's "Autobiography"—an entirely frank and honest book which for years did its author's posthumous reputation unmerited harm—table, pen, paper, and a bottle of ink are not often "Open Sesames" to treasure caves. Some human touch, it may be imperceptible to the critic, probably accounts for the vogue of even the shoddiest best-seller.

Victor Hugo agreed to have his great historical novel "Notre Dame de Paris" finished by April, 1829. A year later not a line had been written, to the annoyance of the publishers. On the excuse of having lost a note-book essential to his work he was allowed five months more. He bought a bottle of ink, dressed himself in a thick piece of grey worsted knitting, locked up his ordinary clothes to put temptation out of his way, and shut himself up in his room to work. The book was finished in time, the end being reached just as he reached the last drop of ink in his bottle, and for a time he contemplated changing the title to "The Contents of a Bottle of Ink."

But very much more came out of that bottle of ink (though Goethe called "Notre Dame" the most detestable book ever written) than any facile scribble passing as an historical novel by virtue of a liberal sprinkling of "Marrys," "Goodens," "By the Masses," "Halidomes," or "I' Faiths." John Buchan, speaking with experience as author of such books as "The Path of the King" and "Mid-winter," has described the historical novel as the most difficult form of fiction. He is undoubtedly right, though comparatively few critics seem to have made his discovery. I have written novels not strictly historical in a fifth of the time taken by an historical novel, and this must be the experience of any writer who has essayed both forms. It is surprising to find

the number of would-be authors, and especially young authors (possibly because to youth the glamour and romance of the past and the poignancy of human transience and mortality appeal most strongly) whose early efforts attempt the conquest of this particular field. It is not only the most difficult, it is also, as a rule, the least remunerative. Of all novels Conrad wrote: "It is a fool's paradise to write fiction for a living." The haziest ideas prevail as to the rewards of imaginative literary work. If an average were taken and published of the earnings of novelists, it would probably do much to relieve the congestion of the book-shelves; certainly very few who, tempted by the prizes, produce historical or pseudo-historical novels in such numbers hoping for gain or fame would have the courage to stay in the lists. There are prizes. George Eliot received £7,000 for the serial rights of that very unsatisfactory novel "Romola"; it seems that her publishers had reason to regret their lavishness. She herself, though an established writer, found unforeseen difficulties in her path when she turned from domestic to historical fiction. At the beginning of 1862 she found so many historical mistakes in her first manuscript that she destroyed it and commenced all over again. And she said that her task (for which "she equipped herself as if for writing a whole Florentine history") turned her from a young woman to an old. Scott, a prodigious worker, made huge sums, but when he was compelled to write for money rather than for love his work suffered, and everyone remembers the pathos of his end. Alexandre Dumas, born in the great Napoleonic age—he saw Napoleon on his way to Waterloo during the Hundred Days, and again on his return before his exile—died at the hour when the Germans reached the coast in the disastrous debacle of 1870; he had made and lost fortunes, and died possessed only of the coin with which he had entered Paris as a youth; his death at the time passed practically unnoticed. A leading London newspaper ended an article, a year or so

back, with a curious comment on the rewards of the historical novelist, instancing the considerable fortune left by Mr. Stanley Weyman. But it is certain that this was no more derived exclusively from his novels than Sir Henry Lucy's large fortune, instanced by Mr. Stanley Unwin in his comparison between the amounts left by publishers and those by literary men and journalists, was derived exclusively from his literary and journalistic work. When Mrs. Radcliffe received £500 for her "Mysteries of Udolpho" it was considered an enormous sum, yet she was already widely known as the author of "The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne" (dealing in a highly sensational fashion, quite unhampered by fact, with Scotland in the Dark Ages), of "The Sicilian Romance," and of "The Romance of the Forest." Scott admired her; Queen Hortense of Holland, lonely and unhappy after Josephine's divorce and Napoleon's remarriage, said of "The Mysteries of Udolpho," which she read in her drawing-room in the Palace of Amsterdam (where the frieze of skulls in black and white marble reminded her that the room had once served as criminal court): "I had no taste for any amusement except reading novels of the most blood-curdling kind. The works of Ann Radcliffe were very useful to me. I could not have fixed my mind on anything serious, and to obtain a moment's respite I was obliged to interest myself in these grisly tales, and in the pictures of miseries much like my own." To anyone who essays the historical novel under the impression that it is an easy form to master, or that large monetary rewards are probable, one can only give, with more emphasis, the hackneyed advice of Mr. Punch in regard to a less hazardous enterprise. An ice-cream barrow or a fried-fish stall would be a better investment; a cross-word puzzle, a ticket for an Italian lottery or a Derby sweepstake, a better speculation.

Don't.

II

But are you content with the probability of having, when "you have made an end of your tale," to take a piece of bread and cheese and go your way?

Gustave Flaubert, that great artist in words whose "Salammbô" is still one of the most notable historical novels of the world, has said that it is better to get drunk on ink than on eau-de-vie; listen to his word of sage advice. "If you feel imperiously driven to reproduce events round you transposed into shape and form, so that everything, even your own existence, seems useless for other purpose, and that you are prepared for all disappointment, ready for all sacrifices, proof against all trials, then I say, 'Take the plunge! Publish!'"

This categorical imperative, the birth and not the making, the persistent urge, that will not be denied, to transpose into form and shape events, not round you but seen through the haze of the past, is the excuse and justification of the historical novelist. Scott's first fragment of prose was "Thomas the Rhymer," a mere fragment of historical fiction. In his earlier life he translated Goethe's "Götz von Berlichingen of the Iron Hand,"* which, in Germany and elsewhere, had considerable influence on fiction and drama of the "Castle of Otranto" and "Mysteries of Udolpho" class—on Scott himself an influence fortunately held in check by his strong common-sense. He finished "Queenhoo Hall" by Joseph Strutt; but did no notable historical work himself until Byron, made famous in a night, caused him to turn his activities from verse to the novel. "Waverley" was not commenced until 1805, when he was about thirty-four, and was put aside owing to unfavourable criticism; he discovered it in a drawer while

* In Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front," I find this reference to Goethe's almost forgotten play: "Tjaden retorts in the well-known phrase from Goethe's 'Götz von Berchlingen,' with which he was always very free."

looking for fishing-tackle nine years or so later, and finished it for publication. Yet his ultimate vocation seems evident from the first. Here was a man taking with unprecedented success to the historical novel at a mature age—but as a small child he had listened with the keenest interest to his grandmother's tales of the moss-troopers and old wars; as a boy at Preston Pans he had drunk in stories of the German Campaigns from the veteran, Dalgetty; he had made friends with a man who had been out in the '15 and the '45 and who had met Rob Roy in a duel; at a very early age, as James Ballantyne records, Scott himself was already an incomparable story-teller. Stevenson has told us how "sooner or later, somehow, anyhow," he knew that he was bound to write a novel. In both these cases the historical novelist, like the poet, was born and not made.

I think this will almost invariably, if not invariably, be found with our greatest writers of historical fiction. There had been the early sense, often in an exaggerated and morbid or even nightmare form, of the glamour, the pathos, the mystery of the past. And there has been the capacity, however limited at first, to recapture some of the spirit of the past in words.

Take Victor Hugo, an ugly, studious little boy, sharing the wild adventures of his family in Spain, where, at a college, he meets a hump-backed man with a red face, matted hair, and in a red woollen waistcoat, plush breeches and yellow stockings, whose duty it was to wake the students at five of the clock every morning. Quasimodo is the result. Take Bulwer Lytton, in his glorious home with its deer-park, its banner which Sir Robert de Lytton carried at Bosworth, its Tudor corridor, and the bed in which the great Elizabeth once slept. He loved nothing better than to hear his eccentric, domineering mother, "Madam Bulwer," as she was always called, recite to him stirring poems of chivalry, and later, as a successful novelist, he paid a warm tribute to her influence in shaping his early

enthusiasms into a career. We see Charles Kingsley listening intently to his grandfather's tales of sea-faring under Rodney; drinking in Devonshire legends from his mother; dreaming on Bideford Quay and on the cobbled steps of Clovelly. Harrison Ainsworth, articled at sixteen to a lawyer, read romances and imitated them in his spare time. Like Fantastic in "The Old Wives' Tale," all these boys thought "a tale of an hour long were as good as an hour's sleep"—and much better; and the tale best to their tastes was one of bygone years. "For my part," says Stevenson, "I liked a story to begin with an old wayside inn where, 'towards the close of the year 17—,' several gentlemen in three-cocked hats were playing bowls." Give him a highwayman and he was full to the brim; a Jacobite would do, but the highwayman was his favourite dish. "I can still hear that merry clatter of the hoofs along the moonlit lane, and the words 'post-chaise,' 'the great North road,' 'ostler' and 'nag' still sound in my ears like poetry." And again: "Men are born with various manias; from my earliest childhood it was mine to make a plaything of imaginary series of events, and as soon as I was able to write I became a good friend to the paper-makers." He wrote his first historical novel, a bulky romance which he describes as "without a spark of merit," when he was sixteen. John Buchan, who wrote romances in early boyhood, one of his choicest describing the discovery of an elephant's nest in a barn, was only sixteen when "John Burnet of Barns" was written. Flaubert, a doctor's son, wove stories out of every episode in his daily life in boyhood. Of his early days at Rouen he wrote later: "I do not know what the dreams of schoolboys are, but ours were splendid in their extravagance. The last ebullitions of romanticism that reached us, circumscribed by our everyday surroundings, brought about a strange excitement. Whilst enthusiastic hearts sighed after dramatic loves, with their accompaniments of gondolas, black masks, and great ladies

fainting in post-chaises in Calabria, others dreamt of conspiracies and rebellions. . . . I remember that one schoolmaster wore a red cap; another declared his intention to live as a Mohican."

That imperious driving of Flaubert's is the real justification and excuse; no other. A course of "New Grub Street" and Galsworthy's play, "The Fugitive," should deter those who attempt historical, or indeed any other form of, fiction, through any desire for fortune or even fame. If these are to come they will. In "The Fugitive" Galsworthy gives a truer picture of the literary life, in spite of exceptions like his own, than can be seen in the pages of any glowing prospectus urging the ease and profit of it. Malise is asked, you remember, by Clare about his income as a literary man, apart from the £150 a year derived from journalism which he is about to lose.

Malise: Out of five books I have made the sum of £40.

That is at least an everyday possibility. It must be a case, to do any really great and lasting work, of "sooner or later, somehow, anyhow." And, having come to a decision or been forced to one, there is no better motto I know than three words of Sir Walter Scott's: "Give yourself royally."

III

Your business now is to do what Stevenson again—who knew what he was saying—described as a most rare and difficult thing: to bend romance to some practical need, and express yourself in its language. And here let me suggest the equipment which will be of use to you.

You will need, in the first place, an education wide and general rather than specialized and narrow; an education which has for its basic principle Juvenal's "Quicquid agunt homines." And, since it is impossible to know all that you will need to know, not the least important part of that

education will be the knowledge of where and how to acquire knowledge. The majority of people turned loose in a great library will be as lost as in a metropolis of streets marked in a foreign tongue. In the correspondence columns of popular papers one sees innumerable questions asked which a little knowledge of books guiding to books would answer easily. Charles Dickens (most of whose work probably suffered little handicap from the fact that he had no public school or university training) needed no knowledge of books to write "Pickwick." But "A Tale of Two Cities" was a different matter. It will be remembered that he went to Carlyle, and was staggered when a van-load of volumes drew up before his door. Stevenson says that Thackeray found it easier to write "Esmond" than "Vanity Fair," because with "Esmond" the style lay ready to hand. I think he is probably wrong; the former book must have been immeasurably more difficult to write, although he was already steeped in his period. With most fiction it is a sound rule for the writer to deal only with what he knows in his personal experience, but the historical novelist has to go beyond personal experience, and enter another world and another age. Like the writer of a present-day novel, he must know something of human nature, but he must also know something of innumerable subjects which can only be learnt from other books. "Whatever men do," comes within his range; he should know something of past politics, of war, of law, of medicine, of botany, of heraldry, of theologies, of genealogies, of bygone geography and topography, of dress . . . and at every step, unless he is cautious, there is danger of a stumble.

To a general knowledge as wide as possible, and to a knowledge of human nature, he must add the knowledge of how to discover and where to discover anything he wants. A recent writer on the historical novel has said: "Easy familiarity with the life of his period is the primary factor on the degree of success in the historical novelist." But

this easy familiarity cannot be acquired solely by mixing with a city crowd, or looking through a village window.

I think a working knowledge of ancient and foreign tongues is essential to anyone applying himself seriously to historical fiction. Rafael Sabatini tells us that as a boy he knew six languages. The novelist should at least be able to read a little Latin, modern and mediæval French, some German, some Italian. These languages (and Spanish might be added) become more and more important as the centuries recede.

He must, of course, learn to write lucidly and effectively in his own tongue. Scott, who, when he completed Strutt's novel, found that its author had been hampered by too great antiquarian knowledge and had made his language too archaic for the ordinary reader, said: "Every work designed for mere amusement must be expressed in language easily comprehended." The novel today is not regarded, at its best, as designed solely for amusement, and one can widen the application of a useful hint.

A wide sympathy with humanity is another essential to any good and lasting work. It is possibly, as I have said, the secret of the success of many best-sellers whose merits are not too easy to find—some human touch which links author, characters, and reader in a common bond. In novels dealing with other times it seems to me of first importance that the writer should be able to draw himself, his reader, and his characters together in this way. Haroun-al-Raschid, opening a book of poems, once read: "Where are the Kings, and where are the rest of the world? They are gone the way which thou shalt go——" and closed the book weeping. Villon found that note of a common humanity when he asked where were the snows of yesteryear, in his ballad of the "dames du temps jadis"; and in another ballad lamented the Holy Apostles and the Golden Emperor of the East, and the champions, dauphins, barons, heralds, pursuivants, trumpeters of other days—

"So much carry the winds away"—and now, as then. The poor dead girl from whose stocking Villon took the mean coin in Stevenson's "A Lodging for the Night" was sister to the dead, polluted loveliness in Villon's ballad, to the prostitute lately covered by the snows of death and time in an Edinburgh slum.

> "Lost is the star from the night,
> And the rose of an hour's delight
> Went—where the roses go."

We hold our breath when Everyman goes into his grave at the summons of the drum; for Everyman is ourselves, and the forgotten author who conceived him, and the forgotten player who first acted him. When Henry Irving spoke Shylock's words of defeat and misery after the trial—"O pray you give me leave to go from hence; I am not well"—a nineteenth-century audience was hushed out of antipathy into pity, understanding, sympathy, with an old, broken man of the Venetian ghetto, long ago.

III.—THE PALACE OF HISTORY

"Fiction is truth's elder sister. . . . No-one in the world knew what truth was till someone had told a story. So it is the oldest of the arts, the mother of history, biography, philosophy and, of course, of politics."—RUDYARD KIPLING.

I

WHETHER he be Louis XIV. strutting in colossal wig and on high red heels at Versailles, or a sweep flourishing with all the artistry he knows his brushes in a suburban chimney, a man should be proud of his profession and champion it. Kipling takes up the cudgels for all fiction; Dumas (and Victor Hugo no less emphatically) blew lusty trumpets for the historical novelist. His craft has no mean ancestry.

One catches a glimpse even in modern times at the beginnings. In Aloysius Horn's account of the Ivory Coast he speaks of a certain Oganga who was troubadour to a tribe of cannibals, and says: "There was a place where the stories were told, and the children taken regularly to hear him sing the great doings of the tribe, to the harp. 'The Palace of History,' it was called." The story of the Palace of History, whose halls and chambers are the historical novels of all ages and countries, has been told elsewhere at greater length, and far more ably, than I can tell it here. You will find the most complete and useful working bibliography I know in a book I shall have occasion to refer to more than once: Mr. Jonathan Nield's "Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales" (fifth edition). Innumerable articles and pamphlets have been written on the subject, even if comparatively few books deal with this branch of fiction exclusively. I have found most useful a careful study not only of Mr. Nield's book, but of Dr.

Ernest Baker's " Guide," which is especially useful for early novels, and has an admirable index; his more recent books on the novel should also be studied, and Sir Walter Raleigh and Professor Saintsbury, who both deal incidentally with historical fiction in their works, will be found invaluable to those who consult them.

For obvious reasons I can sketch only in the briefest outline the history of the historical novel from its dim beginnings to the present day, and its slow development; but some such sketch, however slight, seems to me likely to be helpful.

It has been the fashion to ascribe the origin of the novel to comparatively recent years, and to ignore the infancy and childhood without which it could never have reached its present form. We are told over and over again that Fielding was the first novelist, and that Scott was the first historical novelist. In the same way a critic famous in his day said once that there was no serious historian before the sixth decade of the eighteenth century.

The first historian, if he did not set down his works on paper or even in scratches on the walls of his cave dwelling, was the first man who, having articulate speech (the early cave-dwellers are said to have been physically incapable of complete articulation) came back from battle or the chase with a plain and unvarnished account of his adventures or those of his companions; the first woman who told an ancient love-tale accurately; possibly the first fisherman who did not exaggerate the weight of his catch.

And the first historical novelist was the first man or woman who embroidered the garment of plain fact with a little imaginative lying and turned that fact into a " story." Walter Raleigh says that " the practitioners of historical novel writing, before Scott, were not few in number, although few were qualified for the task." Professor Saintsbury tells us that " Scott created the historical novel after some thousand years of unsuccessful attempt."

I think one may go even farther back for the origin of the written historical novel; "The Book of the Confession of Asenath," for instance, was composed long before the Christian era, and is a long novel with actual characters from history as hero and heroine. It was written down in Greek in the third century, and translated into Latin by our own Bishop Grosstete of Lincoln in the thirteenth. The hero was Joseph, the son of Jacob, and the heroine Potiphah's daughter Asenath, whom Joseph married after many strange and entertaining vicissitudes in the course of true love. Another very early novel, probably historical, was by a continental bishop who, being forced to choose, preferred the loss of his bishopric to laying down his pen. There is one Anglo-Saxon prose romance, translated from the Latin version of a Greek original—Apollonius of Tyre, from which Shakespeare took the plot of Pericles. One must perhaps exclude Homer, as Mr. Gladstone has described his work as "in the highest sense historical" as a record of manners and characters, feelings and tastes, races and countries, principles and institutions, and has decided that his account of the Trojan War is based upon actual fact. Yet so, no doubt, with plentiful embroidery and exaggeration, are the old sagas, Scandinavian and Celtic, and the romance of Charlemagne and his Paladins, of Arthur, and of other paladins, champions and heroes of old time, such as "The Foure Sonnes of Aymon" and the writings on which Malory based a book "for to passe the time." "The Life of Virgilius" was probably derived from Eastern fiction; which reminds us how ancient some of our most familiar stories, those nursery tales holding within their shell a kernel of forgotten or half-forgotten history, often are, and how common to many languages and lands. Whittington's cat tells the tale of a rich Genoese merchant's fortunes as well as those of a Lord Mayor of London; Llewellyn's hound had a brother in long-ago Persia. Riding Hood is Danish as well as English. The ring of Gyges

became the mask of Arthur. Jack the Giant-Killer and Jack and the Bean-stalk are Scandinavian; so is Puss in Boots, though our version has come to us from Straparola, the Italian, by way of Charles Perrault, the Frenchman. But Tom Thumb seems to be Anglo-Saxon.

Mérimée said that he did not care for anything in History but anecdotes. Here and there, in the Middle Ages, we find a lengthy book bearing some resemblance, however faint, to the modern historical novel, but for the most part historical fiction is anecdotal, and the early *novella*, of which the best instances are those by Bandello, Boccaccio, Giovan Straparola, and the collections by William Painter (in his "Palace of Pleasure") was generally a short story, sometimes with a thread of historical truth running through it like a string through barley-sugar. The word "anecdote" is another instance of change of meaning—it comes from the Greek for "things unpublished," and appears to have been first applied by Procopius to the unpublished Memoirs of the Emperor Justinian, which consisted of tales about the private life of his court; anecdotes were "secret histories." The Percy Anecdotes, in a curious derivation probably not to be taken too seriously, say that an "anecdote" was originally a spinster whose life, of necessity or choice, was incomplete. It is a far cry from "the acidulated old maid who atones for the follies of her youth by making her parrot say 'Amen' to her prayers against novels" of whom Ruskin wrote in an early essay, nearly a century ago now, to the recorded anecdotes of the monasteries, or the tales through which Boccaccio was to exercise so great an influence on literature.

One of the most important, if not the most important, of these collections of anecdotes or very short stories—recorded when few could write, and when men and women, like Villon's mother, found their books in frescoes and fretted stone and stained glass—was the "Gesta Romanorum." This thirteenth-century "Acts of the Romans" (by the

way, it had nothing to do with the Romans) was a collection of rather foolish little stories, some of which contained the germ of later historical novels. The famous Italian collection of a hundred little stories known as "Il Novellino" came later. Many of the tales in Boccaccio were based on early romances, and on the "Decameron" were based in their turn some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the plot of "All's Well that Ends Well," part of "Cymbeline," and the casket incident in the "Merchant of Venice." Keats, Tennyson, Longfellow, and George Eliot were indebted to them, and they evidently inspired Maurice Hewlett to write what I think is his most delightful book, "Little Novels of Italy," dealing with real characters and incidents in the history of the Italian duchies and tyrannies of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. (Even Messer Cino of the Live Coal was an unimportant but very real and much alive poet, long ago.) The Italian influence on fiction, and especially historical fiction, is very marked. It is interesting, by the way, to notice that W. D. Howells said even in the nineteenth century that everybody in Rome was "anecdoted."

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth century one finds here and there novels comparatively modern in form which it is a little baffling to classify; what is one to say, for instance, of "Thomas of Reading, or the Six Worthy Yeomen of the West," by Thomas Deloney, a silk-weaver of Norwich in Elizabeth's reign? It deals with the times of Henry the Eighth, and many of the characters are taken from history, or what passed for history. He was the first novelist to make the life around him real and actual to his present and past readers. His "Jack of Newbury" introduces Henry VIII., Cardinal Wolsey, and the jester Will Summers. Recently Deloney has been rediscovered by M. Abel Chevalley, the eminent French critic.* Nashe's only novel,

* Allibone's entry (1859) against Thomas Deloney is "Declaration made by the Archbishop of Collen upon the deed of his marriage, Lon., 1583."

"The Life of Jack Wilton," also makes use of history as a background. "Jack of Newbury" (otherwise John Winchcombe), whose "most pleasant and delectable historie" Deloney recounts, begins in quite the modern fashion:

"In the days of King Henry the Eighth, that most noble and victorious Prince, in the beginning of his reign, John Winchcomb, a broad-cloth weaver, dwelt in Newbury, a town in Berkshire; who for that he was a man of a merry disposition, and honest conversation, was wondrous well-beloved of rich and poor, specially because in every place where he came he would spend his money with the best, and was not at any time found a churl of his purse."

The scenes in which Jack, King Harry, Will Summers, and Queen Katherine take part are well worth reading for their brisk dialogue, the songs with which they are interspersed and the vivid pictures of the times. "The Unfortunate Traveller, or The Life of Jack Wilton," begins after its dedication to the Earl of Southampton and its "Induction to the dapper Mounsier Pages of the Court" with a magnificent reference to the time when Henry the Eighth—"the only true subject of Chronicles—advanced his standard against the two hundred and fifty towers of *Turney* and *Turwin*, and had the Emperor and all the nobility of Flanders, Holland, and Brabant as mercenary attendants"; about that time, the author makes his hero commence: "I, Jack Wilton (a Gentleman at least), was a certain kind of an appendix or page, belonging or appertaining to or unto the confines of the English court." His story towards the end of the book of Cutwolfe, the poor cobbler of Verona, and "Esdras of Granado," is a thrilling piece of narrative.

Deloney died in 1600, Nashe about a year later; some fifteen years later still, on the 23rd of April, 1616—St. George's Day, the Saint whose image is said to have been painted on Arthur's banners, and who, according to Selden, was Patron Saint of this country in Anglo-Saxon days—by a strange coincidence two of the greatest authors in the

world's literature died : Shakespeare and Cervantes. "Don Quixote," a book of which I, for one, can never tire, may be called a semi-historical novel; it certainly enshrines more actual history than is generally supposed. Miguel de Cervantes was at the Battle of Lepanto, rose from his sick bed to take part in the fighting, and "for the greater glory of the right," as he said, was severely wounded. It has been suggested that Don Quixote is actually Quixada, the foster-father of Don John of Austria, and a man who nowadays would undoubtedly be described as "quixotic." Philip of Spain, Don John, and other great figures of the time, are evidently interwoven with this glorious narrative of old Spain. One wishes that Shakespeare had filled some of his idler years by attempting the historical novel as he did, in many of his plays, attempt and successfully achieve historical fiction in another form. If he was no exact historian he was evidently in love with history, and had the historic sense. The prose dialogue in his historical plays show how vividly he would have made his characters play their parts on a different stage. Take the prose passages in his historical plays; for example, Act 1, Scene 2, of the first part of "King Henry IV.," in which Prince Hal, Falstaff, and Poins meet in the Prince's apartment in London, or better still the first scene in Act 2 in the inn-yard at Rochester, and some succeeding scenes, which, with the addition of a few connecting words and a little revision, might make admirable chapters in an historical novel.

Enter a Carrier with a lantern in his hand.

FIRST CARRIER : Heigh-ho ! an it be not four by the day,
I'll be hanged ; Charles' wain is over the new chimney,
and yet our horse not packed. What, ostler !
OSTLER (*within*) : Anon, anon.

The Rochester inn scene is a most vivid description of the bustling country inn of Shakespeare's own time—and one might say of Henry the Fourth's time if the "turkeys

in my pannier are quite starved" were not an anachronism. I am convinced that Shakespeare would have made an admirable historical novelist, and this cannot be said of every dramatist or even historian; one Victorian critic remarked that Macaulay, for instance, would have made a grotesque failure as an historical novelist.

II

But drama, in the age of Shakespeare and that succeeding it, kept the novel in the background. There is considerable dispute as to the first novel which can actually be called modern—though of course here we edge on tautology, a novel being "something new," and a modern novel "a modern new thing." One cannot dismiss Deloney or Nashe lightly, as they are the earliest English historical novelists whose work has some resemblance at least to late fiction of this school. Fielding is generally cited as the father of the English novel, and Scott of the historical novel. But critics have given both as many fathers as Homer had birthplaces. A claim has been put in, for instance, in favour of Rich's "Strange and Wonderful Adventures of Don Simonides, A Gentleman Spaniard" (1581), from which the plot of "Twelfth Night" was taken. Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," and especially his "Holy War," might at least be described as semi-historical; he has used freely, for instance, his experiences and those of his neighbours in the Civil Wars; though only comparatively recently evidence has been discovered showing on which side Bunyan himself fought. In his great books, where allegorical characters move and converse with a vivid actuality rare up to his day even with characters in fiction not parabolic, there can be no doubt that many actual figures of the mid-seventeenth century, and certainly many historic buildings and similarly useful adjuncts to his background, have been employed; some have been identified. But Defoe's

"Memoirs of a Cavalier" seems to me perhaps the most striking example of an historical novel in his century. Lord Chatham was convinced that it was a true record, as were certainly many readers of less intelligence and eminence. Defoe's methods, to which I shall refer later, are worth very careful study by those interested in the Art and Practice of Historical Fiction. He was a past-master in the art and practice of leg-pulling, and did what he essayed to do with a success rarely equalled, and never excelled. Even Swift failed sometimes, if the story of the old Victorian lady who said that really it was almost impossible to believe all "Gulliver" true, may be accepted.

After Defoe's death (in 1731) we may safely, I think, leap over the better part of a century until we come to the greatest name in the story of the historical novel, Sir Walter Scott. Sir Walter Raleigh "Secundus" (as an eminent critic calls him to distinguish him from his great predecessor) says in his standard work on "The English Novel" that "the historical novelists who preceded Scott chose a century as they might have chosen a partner for a dance, gaily and confidently, without qualification or equipment beyond a few outworn verbal archaisms." This is certainly true of nearly all. There were colossal works of almost incredible dulness, farragos many of them, in which classical times mingled freely with days far more recent. How long and ineffectual a seventeenth-century novel could be has been shown in "Parthenissa," by Roger Boyle, Lord Orrery, which he could never bring to a conclusion: after eight hundred pages the two chief characters who appear in the first are still in the same place. Oliver Wendell Holmes may be right in saying that the foolishest book is a kind of leaky boat on a sea of wisdom, and that some of the wisdom will get in anyhow; but one would not select a leaky boat on a great sea if a better were to be had, nor a Spanish galleon or the *Aquitania* to take a fox and a brace of geese across a pond. Mademoiselle de Scudéry's "Grand Cyrus,"

the hero of which was actually the great Condé, contains about 1,800,000 words—about 1,100,000 more than Tolstoy's enormous "War and Peace," and more than twenty-five times as many as Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter"! The whole of the Waverley Novels only contain about 4,000,000. This prodigious lady, who tells us that she was spoken of as a person of mature judgment when she was only twelve, and was already at that tender age the admiration of the whole world, deserves at least a passing notice because of the immense success of "The Grand Cyrus," and other vast productions peopled with the heroes of antiquity, or more modern heroes clad in their garb and names, as Jacobean statues were dressed in toga and greaves. The romantic and supernatural school held the field for a time after these

> "Counterfeiting epics, shrill with trumps,
> A babe might blow between two straining cheeks
> Of bubbled rose to make his mother laugh,"

with their well-nigh interminable love scenes, often in the vein of Richardson's "Sir Charles Grandison," who, in arranging the day of his marriage with his betrothed, wrote: "Loveliest and dearest of women . . . my utmost gratitude will ever be engaged by the condescension, whenever ye shall distinguish the day of the year, distinguished as it will be to the end of my life, that shall give me the greatest blessing of it and confirm me;" Fanny Burney's works contain remarkable passages in the same strain. Horace Walpole's "Castle of Otranto" had an immense and, to our minds, surprising influence on the novel of his generation and that immediately succeeding it. Like Scott, he concealed his identity with the author until its success was assured. Walpole tells us, in a letter dated March 9th, 1769, how this once-famous medley of horrors and pseudo-history originated. "Shall I confess to you," he says, "what was the origin of this romance? I waked one morning in the

beginning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover was that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head like mine, filled with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowledge in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew in my hands, and I grew fond of it. In short, I was so engrossed with my tale, which I completed in two months, that one evening I wrote from the time I had drunk tea, about six o'clock, till half an hour after one in the morning, when my hand and fingers were so weary that I could not hold the pen to finish the sentence." Skulls, skeletons, sliding panels, vaults, trap-doors, a sword which required the strength of a hundred men to lift it, a hero imprisoned in a colossal helmet, a statue from the nose of which issued drops of blood, are among the ingredients of a book which has long ceased to chill the blood or raise the scalp of readers. False geography, spurious history, morbid and uncontrolled imagination, a complete disregard for verisimilitude, characterize most of these works of the period of the romantic revival; though they served a purpose in the development of historical fiction—to which they themselves, however, had no valid claims to belong. Crabbe, in "The Library," has some lines which sum up admirably this school:

> "Hark! hollow blasts through empty courts resound
> And shadowy forms with staring eyes stalk round;
> See! moats and bridges, walls and castles rise,
> Ghosts, fairies, demons, dance before our eyes."

"The Castle of Otranto" professes to describe Italy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but it is even less than a guess at truth. Mrs. Radcliffe's "Mysteries of Udolpho" had at least this merit, that she made some attempt to give a reasonable solution to her mysteries. "Udolpho" is again a pretence of history, in the days of Henri III. of

France, and another of Mrs. Radcliffe's books which was once admired is "The Italian," a tale of Naples in the middle of the eighteenth century. She had some gifts as a writer, but one is a little staggered to hear on Gray's authority that Cambridge was terrified out of its sleep at night by the "Mysteries of Udolpho," and to read the comment of an early Victorian critic that Homer, who caused Mount Ida, the Greek fleet and the Trojan City to tremble "all together" as the gods came down into battle, was really responsible for these extravagances. It may be so. Horace Walpole, in 1759, not so very long before "The Castle of Otranto" was inspired by his dream and scribbled down, was a subscriber ("two copies") to the first complete English verse translation of Sophocles, by Francklin, Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge, and Francklin, remarking that Greek Tragedy was out of fashion among the great, said "Homer, Xenophon, and Demosthenes have of late years put on an English habit and gained admission into what is called polite society."*

While the world was being thrilled by Walpole, Godwin, Mrs. Radcliffe, and others of their school—sitting up to the small hours, doubtless, in semi-panic, as the boy Rousseau and his father had sat up to devour romances of an earlier school like La Calprenède's "far-fam'd romance" "Cassandra" (they were all "most famous" or "far-fam'd" or "most pleasant and diverting")—some tentative essays were being made in the historical novel proper. France, which had given the world Madame de la Fayette's "The Princess of Cleves," fifty years or so later produced a pseudo-historical novel of some temporary note by the Abbé Prévost d'Exiles about an imaginary natural son of Oliver Cromwell: "Mr. Cleveland." Italy was so busy with novels, the historical or semi-historical among them, in the seventeenth century, that an Italian novelist exclaimed ecstatically,

* "Æschylus and Sophocles: their Work and Influence," by J. T. Sheppard, M.A., Litt.D. (Harrap).

" Gran secolo dei romanzi è questo !"—" This is a fine time for romances !"—while a sober historian, jealous no doubt of rivals, observed that the world seemed to have gone mad over the writing and reading of novels.

In America Charles Brockden Brown had anticipated Robert Montgomery Bird and the more famous, though less realistic, James Fenimore Cooper in novels of which the Red Indian was the hero. In our own country, Clara Reeve wrote a novel about the Wars of the Roses which attracted some attention, and Sophia Lee produced, among other novels, a popular medley called " The Recess," with a fictitious daughter of Mary of Scots and of the Duke of Norfolk as heroine. More important was Jane Porter, whose " Scottish Chiefs," in which figure Wallace, Bruce, Edward I. of England, and Philip IV. of France, is still read and worth reading. This appeared in 1810. Four years later another and greater novel based on Scottish history took the reading world by storm—" Waverley," by Walter Scott, Esquire, Advocate; though the world did not know that it was by the writer whose name appears thus on the title-page of the translation of Götz von Berlichingen, and whose fame as a poet had been or was being eclipsed by Byron.

IV.—THE KING OF THE ROMANTICS

"I cannot dismiss English, or British imaginative literature without the cheerful name of Walter Scott. In my opinion he deserves to rank next to Shakespeare. Both are, in their best and absolute quality, continental not British—both teeming, luxuriant, true to their lands and origin, namely feudality, yet ascending into universalism."—WALT WHITMAN.

I

IT does not lie within the scope or possibility of this book to deal exhaustively with the development of historical fiction, or, at any length, with even the greatest names connected with it. But it is impossible not to emphasize the immense change which Scott initiated, even if I do not altogether agree with one of the greatest living authorities on the historical novel who, on hearing that I had been invited to write upon it, wrote to say that of course the historical novel proper began with Scott. Dr. Johnson has compared fame to a shuttlecock, which will soon fall to the ground if it be struck only from one end of the room. The fame of Walter Scott need fear no fall within the immediate future if one may judge from the buffeting it receives from different angles. Whitman, speaking of him, said that it would be ungracious to pick spots upon the shining sun, but others are less reticent. In spite of the enthusiasm of his contemporaries (which reached its climax in the acclamation following his announcement that his pen had written "Waverley" and its successors) and in spite of almost unanimous eulogy from the Victorians, there have always been voices in dispraise—or that faint praise which is worse than no praise at all. Peacock, for instance, whose own books (with some temerity) I venture to think a little over-

rated, considered Scott a pantomime painter—and added that the pantomime painter was the better man of the two. Carlyle, qualifying his criticism with compliments, observed that the great fact about the "Waverley" novels was that they were faster written and better paid than any books in the world. Taine says that Scott was "the favourite of his age, read over the whole of Europe, was compared and almost equalled to Shakespeare, had more popularity than Voltaire, made dressmakers and duchesses weep, and earned about £200,000." Mr. E. M. Forster, admitting rather slightingly that Scott could tell a good story, has some fairly hard things to say about him; but considers that "if he had passion he would be a great writer—no amount of clumsiness or artificiality would matter then." Leslie Stephen added to Sir Francis Palgrave's remark that historical novels were mortal enemies to history the comment that they were also mortal enemies to fiction, and said that Ivanhoe, Kenilworth, Quentin Durward, and the rest were "of course" audacious anachronisms for the genuine historian. Miss Marjorie Bowen has been perhaps a little too reluctant to recognize Scott's influence on later work, though she appreciates his greatness. And Mr. Arnold Bennett has accused Scott of lack of originality, lack of truth in his pictures of former days, and other crimes and deficiencies.

On the other hand we find a host of champions ready to take up the challenge, and an army of dead critics who made no question of the outstanding greatness of Scott. Wordsworth wrote of "this wondrous potentate." Lord Talfourd, in a glowing eulogy, said that his characters were no shadowy abstractions but men fashioned of human earth and warm with human sympathies. W. H. Prescott said that it was Scott's great glory that by wise attention to costume and character he had raised his novels to historic importance without injuring their interest as works of art, adding, "Who now would imagine that he could form a

satisfactory notion of the golden days of Queen Bess that had not read 'Kenilworth,' or of Richard Cœur de Lion and his brave paladins that had not read 'Ivanhoe'?" Lord John Russell went further when he said, "The works of Scott will furnish entertainment to many generations; nor is there likely to be any race of men so fastidious as to recognize anything purer, so spoilt by excitement as to need anything more amusing, or so grave as to scorn all delight from this kind of composition."

Sir Archibald Alison (but he was far from accurate himself) spoke with enthusiasm of Scott's accuracy, especially when his foot was on his native soil. Washington Irving was his warm admirer. Charlotte Yonge, an historian and novelist of greater merit than is generally recognized, could finish almost any passage quoted from his novels. Gladstone said that both his memory and his works would live. Ruskin, protesting against the Victorian antipathy to fiction, poured out torrents of undiluted praise. Hazlitt, though he said that his style as mere style was vile laziness, also said that his works taken together were almost like a new edition of human nature. Tennyson, who loved a good historical novel, called him the most chivalrous literary figure of the century and the author with the widest range since Shakespeare. F. D. Maurice said that Scott had kindled a healthy desire for real histories, not merely historical novels. Balzac advised Charles de Bernard to write historical novels like Scott—though (perhaps for obvious reasons) the advice was not taken. Cardinal Newman said, "Whether we will or no, the phraseology of Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott have become a portion of the vernacular tongue, the household words, of which perhaps we little guess the origin, and the very idioms of our familiar conversation. . . . So tyrannous is the literature of a nation; it is too much for us. We cannot destroy or reverse it." In our own times we find the names of Lord Oxford and Asquith, Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Baldwin among his readers and admirers;

Lord Birkenhead tells an audience that before he went to Oxford he had read every one of Scott's novels at least three times, and, in spite of limited means in earlier life, has gradually acquired a first edition of all Scott's poems and all his novels, including the rare "Waverley"; Mr. Hugh Walpole has championed him warmly; Mr. John Erskine (in "The Delight of Great Books") says that he gave us the historical novel in a splendour never equalled; and Dean Inge that Scott, by the unsullied purity of his genius, rendered an inestimable service to his age, and founded a tradition of clean writing in English fiction.

I think it is possible to recognize his faults and limitations, to some of which I shall have occasion to refer, without dethroning him. He had advantages which can never recur: the advantage of writing without serious competition (in a year when the earlier "Waverley" novels were at the height of their fame only twenty-six novels were added to the shelves of the British Museum Library); the advantage of being adopted by an age which, as a rule, set its face rigidly against fiction; the advantage of character and personality. It is difficult to dissociate the writer as writer from the man of whom Thackeray, contrasting him with "The First Gentleman in Europe"—to whom, of course, Thackeray was flagrantly unjust—wrote: "What a good gentleman, what a friendly soul, what a generous hand, what an amiable life was that of the noble Sir Walter." It is difficult to forget the amiability which kept so many friends, and engaged in no literary squabble; the keen sense of honour which was proof against illness and financial ruin; the indomitable courage. There is a story of Bayard, as a youth, being asked by a gentleman what goods the noble man should leave to his children; he was answered: "Those which fear neither rain, nor storm, nor the power of man, nor human justice—*wisdom and virtue.*"

Scott was the Bayard of literature, and Stevenson, though not uncritical of his faults, his "Loyal Servant." He says

that one or two of Scott's novels were among the inner circle of his intimates. "How often I have read 'Guy Mannering,' 'Rob Roy,' and 'Redgauntlet,' I have no means of knowing, having begun young." To him Scott was "out and away the King of the Romantics."

II

Like Stevenson, I "began young" with the works of Sir Walter Scott; early editions of his poems were in our small family library, and in a quiet school library I read again and again his novels, some of which I have read again and again in later years, with less, no doubt, of the early enthusiasm, but still with enjoyment and admiration. In my earlier boyhood I came in touch with the lingering Victorian distrust of fiction, though not in an aggressive form. I remember as a small boy spending hours in my grandfather's library, which contained some notable and fascinating books but was practically fictionless—if one excludes innumerable volumes of now forgotten theology. Some remark of his led me to ask whether he disapproved of novels. Very diffidently, he told me (treating me charmingly as an equal in age and wisdom—we were great friends, and he knew the whole art and practice of being grandfather to a dreamy and imaginative boy): "Yes, for myself I do."

"Even Dickens?"

"Yes. For several reasons I do not even approve of Dickens." But only once or twice do I remember any censorship being attempted, either by him or any other of Kenneth Grahame's "Olympians." When it was attempted, it defeated its own ends, as censorship always does. My grandfather discovered me reading a book in which some passages were certainly not intended for children, and advised me to leave it alone. But the result, at an early opportunity, was a diligent search for these passages which might otherwise have passed unnoticed, yet now had the fascination of the prohibited and dangerous. On a later

occasion, by another friendly hand, "Pickwick" was given me in place of a novel by Harrison Ainsworth, which had just introduced me to an inn-parlour where highwaymen were watching from their corner a pursy citizen whom they meant to rob and perhaps murder on his road. To this day I cannot read "The Pickwick Papers" without a lurking suspicion that they contain an allegory, and are a kind of "Pilgrim's Progress" with Mr. Pickwick as Christian and Mrs. Bardell an Apollyon seeking to destroy him.

We are not so very far from the times when Trollope's publisher, an intelligent and able man of business, asked him to alter "fat stomach" into "deep chest." In an essay written nearly a century ago (in 1836, four years or so after Scott's death) Ruskin asked, "Does the perusal of works of fiction act favourably or unfavourably on the moral character?" and made a vigorous onslaught on the enemies of fiction—but chiefly on the grounds that the best fiction did good to the character, and not harm. G. P. R. James, that entirely worthy man, said that his object was to show that fiction, without being tedious, might be rendered serviceable to every noble principle, and enlist imagination on the side of virtue. F. D. Maurice's test of a good book was its success in showing a divine discipline at work to form men. Sydney Smith took a more modern view. "The main question of a novel," he says, "is—did it amuse? Were you surprised with dinner coming too soon? Did you mistake 11 for 10, 12 for 11? If a novel produces these effects it is good. Who can read Mr. Hallam's "Middle Ages" when in the middle of an exciting novel?" And many years after Sydney Smith, Mr. Arnold Bennett said (before he had changed many of his opinions, but I do not suppose he has changed this): "All dull books are bad, and all tiresome books are either bad or maladroit or both."

Scott, for all his occasional dulness, showed that the novel might be at once interesting and respectable. He

enlisted many of the great army of readers who were half-afraid of fiction; the people who, in mid-Victorian days, would be horrified at a theatre or a music-hall, but would go in crowds to see a play at German Reed's, or a music-hall performance at the Crystal Palace. He did not invent the historical novel, but he improved it out of knowledge, making it something almost entirely new. Mr. Bennett has spoken contemptuously of his lack of originality and his "clichés." But where did he get his "clichés"? And whom, to any notable extent, has he imitated?

His mind was stored with legends, romances, old songs. Yet "Once upon a time" does not begin any of his books, and he was as much entitled to make use of legend, and improve it out of knowledge, as Kipling was entitled to take the old story of Wayland for the thread of "Puck of Pook's Hill"—one has more right to attack Kipling because of his inaccurate version of an old story. Scott came under the influence of the romantic movement, but strong common-sense set him almost free from it. There is a vast difference between "The Castle of Otranto," "The Mysteries of Udolpho," and some of the German and Spanish romances of the supernatural with which he was so familiar, and that grim little masterpiece "The Tale of Wandering Willie" in "Redgauntlet." Many of the quite early romances (not all) would scarcely be parodied by Lewis Carroll's Jabberwock, which "with eyes of flame came whiffling through the tulgey wood, and burbled as it came," until

> "One two! One, two! And through and through
> The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!"

and its slayer galumphed back with its head.

Scott is not only miles and miles ahead of most of the very early romances; he is miles and miles ahead of the "Otranto" school, and of the early experimenters in the historical novel, and although he was influenced by his predecessors and retained in dilution some of their extrava-

gances, he made the historical novel not only clean but probable. After reading "Götz von Berlichingen," I am inclined to think that this may have had the strongest influence on his historical novels; his translation appeared fifteen years or so before "Waverley" was actually published. "Ivanhoe" was certainly influenced by it. Seeley described Goethe's play as a dramatized memoir; perhaps I shall be forgiven if I say a few words about a work which, in my opinion, has really had considerable influence on the historical novel, though it is comparatively unimportant in itself.

It deals with Germany in the fifteenth century, during the reign of Maximilian I. Before his famous Edict of August 7th, 1495, the German barons were practically independent, owning no master except their remote suzerain the Kaiser. They enjoyed what was called Faustrecht—the right of private feud—on certain recognized conditions; it was, for instance, necessary to give three days' notice before the commencement of hostilities against a neighbour. The written form of challenge or defiance was known as a "Feldbrief." Confederacies of barons were formed, which bore such melodramatic titles as "Brothers of the Mace" and "Knights of the Bloody Sleeve." When Maximilian's Edict was published, and those engaging in these petty wars were put under the Ban of the Empire, Götz von Berlichingen was one of the most doughty champions of the Free Knights whose privileges were thus curtailed. In his Introduction Walter Scott (his name appeared on a few early copies as "William Scott") referred to German fictional works which had interested him—"the excellent romances called Unna and Alf von Duilman."

Among the *dramatis personæ* of "Götz" we find the Emperor Maximilian, Götz von Berlichingen himself, his page George, the Abbot of Fulda, a Doctor of Laws, Brother Martin a monk, Lerse a trooper, the President, Accuser and Avenger of the Secret Tribunal, two Nuremberg

merchants, "An Unknown," a gipsy captain, Sticks and Wolf (two gipsies), gipsy women, an Imperial captain and officers, an innkeeper, a sentinel, gaolers, and courtiers. The first scene of the first act is in an inn at Schwarzenberg in Franconia, where we find two Swabian peasants at table, and near-by two troopers from the old Prince-Bishopric of Bamberg—where, by the way, more than two centuries later the Prince-Bishops lived in such state that their dinners were announced by heralds with silver trumpets, and their horses dwelt in marble stalls. The opening words might come from the pages of an historical novel:

"Hansel!" (*cries the first peasant to the Innkeeper*) "another cup of brandy—and Christian measure."

INNKEEPER: "Thou art a Never-Enough."

Now turn for a second to the opening lines of "Kenilworth": "It is the privilege of taletellers to open their story in an inn." Or turn again to the Unknown in "Ivanhoe," to the Secret Tribunal in "Anne of Geierstein," to "The Abbot"—but if one compares this early translation with Scott's novels it is impossible not to see many indications of its influence. I notice that my friend the late Mr. Walter Jerrold once said that the historical novel started full-grown from Sir Walter Scott. I cannot go so far as that; it had an infancy, a youth. But Scott left it a new thing. "The Book of the Confession of Asenath," many long centuries before, was an historical novel, in one of the two parts of which at least was an ingenious plot centred round actual figures of history; Deloney and Nashe had the root of the matter in them, though Dr. Baker very rightly says that Elizabethan fiction was "an obscure, slight, and unsatisfactory affair"; and the eighteenth century and very early nineteenth had their historical novels to which we cannot altogether refuse the name. But Scott left the historical novel a new thing. He gave it a new probability, a new stature, a new dignity; henceforth it was to take a recognized place in literature.

III

The influence of others on his work was not in the smallest degree comparable to the influence he himself exerted, and still exerts. Miss Marjorie Bowen, who has written half-a-hundred admirable historical novels, and whose views on the historical novel are entitled to the utmost respect, has suggested, in an article on neglected novelists, that undue importance has been paid to Scott's alleged influence. With much that she says I am in warm agreement, but I notice that she includes "Henry Esmond" among the great historical novels that "owed nothing to him," and goes on to say "the huge vogue of Dumas caused a number of cloak-and-sword novels to appear which followed the Frenchman, not Scott. On the other hand, there was R. L. Stevenson with his fresh, delightful tales, which certainly owe nothing to his fellow-countryman."

Thackeray, we know, was a voracious reader of novels in his youth, and in 1850—two years before "Esmond" appeared—he published "Rebecca and Rowena," a Romance on a Romance, which was illustrated by Richard Doyle. Trollope called this the best burlesque in any language. Ivanhoe is henpecked by Rowena, who was always flinging Rebecca at him. This was an expansion of his "Proposals for a Continuation of Ivanhoe" in *Fraser's Magazine*, 1846; it certainly seems to indicate that a study of Scott entered into his own subsequent success as an historical novelist. Now Andrew Lang, writing in "The Old Pretender" about "Esmond" itself, says that the scenes in "Esmond" in which James runs after the sweetheart of his servant Lockwood and after Beatrix, the sister of his host Frank Castlewood, the lady-love of Esmond, his crossing swords with Castlewood, his levity in the kind house which shelters him, are merely an unconscious reproduction by Thackeray of Scott's chapter on Charles II.—a fugitive sheltered at Woodstock after Worcester fight. "Charles or Louis

Kerneguy is James; Alice Lee is Beatrix Esmond; Phœbe is Lockwood's lass; Joceline is Lockwood; Albert Lee is Frank Castlewood; Colonel Everard is Colonel Esmond. Charles could do such things, but James could no more run after the girl, reckless of safety, cause and honour, than he could forswear his faith."

And take Dumas. His early play "Richard Darlington" was inspired by "Chronicles of the Canongate," and Dumas became an historical novelist, as he has told us himself in his "Memoirs"—this part of which at all events seems actual fact—owing to his friend Lassagne introducing him to the works of the great Scottish writer. Dumas had spoken of a novel he thought of copying, and Lassagne said, "But France is not waiting for that."

"What is she waiting for?" asked the lad.

"For the historical novel."

"But the history of France is so dull. People tell me so."

"Poor boy! Read for yourself, and have an opinion of your own."

He read "Ivanhoe" because of his friend's advice, and was at first puzzled by the jokes of Wamba, Cedric's jester and the rude habits of Gurth the swineherd, but gradually the Great Magician cast his spell over him.

"But when the author introduced me to the old Saxon's romantic dining-hall" (Dumas goes on), "when I had seen the fire on the hearth fed by a whole oak-tree, with its light sparkling on the monk and on the dress of the unknown pilgrim; when I saw all the members of the family of the thane take their places at the long oak board, from the head of the castle, the King of his territory, to the meanest servitor; when I saw the Jew Isaac in his yellow cap and his daughter Rebecca in her gold corselet; when the tourney at Ashby had given me a foretaste of the powerful sword-shakes and lance-thrusts, that I should come across again in Froissart, oh! then, little by little, the clouds that had veiled my sight began to lift, I saw open before me more extended horizons than any that had appeared to me."

Scott's extraordinary popularity on the Continent, and especially, for obvious reasons, in France, makes it almost impossible to say where his influence does not extend. Directly or indirectly we trace it in the work of novelists other than historical (but these most of all), of dramatists, artists, poets, musicians. There are references to this in the delightful "Autobiography of Hans Andersen." Gorki was brought indirectly into the range of his influence when a cook's boy on a Volga steamboat under a cook with literary tastes, who placed his small and well-thumbed library at his disposal. The other day I received a letter asking me to write a brief Foreword to a thesis which was being written for a Welsh University, and the abstract of the thesis sent me showed a careful tracing of Scott's influence, not on the historical novel only, but on the development of subsequent fiction not necessarily historical in our language. Scott certainly influenced such Spanish writers as Espronceda, Trueba y Cosio, Juan Valera, and Amos de Escalante; possibly also Martinez de la Rosa. Mr. Brimley Johnson remarks: "As Defoe had gone off the line to extreme realism, Scott suddenly revived the full glory of romance; no longer, indeed, artificial or false in sentiment and deed, but once more leaving his own people and his own times for a more heroic past, historically architected. The historical or national novel was born." And again, "In its historic aspect, this fiction-form is the work of one man, who created and completed it." If this is not absolutely true it is somewhere near the truth.

IV

Mr. J. B. Priestley, one of our most distinguished modern critics and novelists (now engaged, rather curiously, with other eminent critics and novelists in a paper-chase with a flock of docile followers at their heels), speaks in very high terms of Scott's work, about which, he says rightly, "a

great deal of nonsense has been talked these last few years." But he warns readers not to fall into the common mistake of judging Scott by his later and inferior work, and says that he should be read as the author of the early Scotch novels, among which he includes "Redgauntlet." Scott seems to have contradicted himself about his Scottish books; he said that he was happiest and most at ease when on his own soil, but then, though "Old Mortality" was his favourite, or one of his favourites, he said also that "Waverley" had a "sneaking piece of imbecility" for hero, that "The Bride of Lammermoor" was "monstrous, gross, and grotesque," and that "Rob Roy" smelt of the cramp. We will let that pass; but "Redgauntlet," which Mr. Priestley specially mentions, was published in 1824. Now previously to this, in addition to the Scottish novels, Scott had published "Ivanhoe" (1820), "Kenilworth" (1821)—of both of which Mr. Priestley speaks with some disparagement—"The Fortunes of Nigel" (1822), "Peveril of the Peak" (1823), and "Quentin Durward" (1823). "Woodstock" was published three years after "Redgauntlet," and has been highly praised and warmly defended by Ruskin and others; I have heard an exceedingly competent modern critic describe it as his best novel, though I am far from agreeing with this verdict. It is fair to say that Mr. Priestley has this in his favour: in April, 1819, Scott for the first time felt unfit for the exertion of writing, and began to dictate; "Redgauntlet"—and also "The Fortunes of Nigel"—coincide with two short intervals of health. The fact remains that in the glorious prime of his powers he wrote indifferently Scottish and other novels—with, I think, success in both instances.

Eight centuries or so of history are the result of this amazing and dauntless activity. The pathetic but inspiring story of his later years is well known; I do not know how many readers will remember the details of that first year of illness when "Ivanhoe" was written, in addition to other notable

work? In that year (1819) he was so ill that his case was regarded as hopeless, and a curious tale is told of Lord Buchan, who had an immense admiration for his genius, not then, of course, fully revealed to the world, making arrangements for his friend's funeral, and forcing his way into Scott's room because he thought he would be interested to know how magnificently he would be buried.

"The Waverley Novels" take us not only to the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands, but to the Shetland and Orkney Islands (in "The Pirate"), to London, Oxfordshire, Warwick, Derby, the Isle of Man, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Windsor, Northumberland, Cumberland, the Isle of Wight, and other parts of the British Isles; on his magic carpet we visit, among other foreign countries and cities, Syria, Constantinople, Scutari, France, Flanders, Holland, India (in "The Surgeon's Daughter"), and Germany. Five of his novels deal with the period from 1000 to 1400; three the fifteenth century; four the sixteenth, eight the seventeenth, seven the first half of the eighteenth, and eight the second half of the eighteenth century. In "Ivanhoe" it has been estimated* that there are 153 individualized characters, and about 1,700 in all the "Waverley" series.

When all is said, and without shutting one's eyes to his limitations, errors, occasional misinterpretations, too frequent wastes of dreariness, his bursts of bombast and too frequent slipshoddiness of style, I still maintain that Sir Walter Scott stands alone when we judge his work not by individual books but *en masse*, and by its influence. From that influence, it seems to me, it is almost impossible for any later historical novelist to escape altogether, though we may be warned by his faults, and learn by his failures and imperfections.

* In "The Study of a Novel," by Selden L. Whitcomb, M.A. (D. C. Heath and Co., 1906).

V.—FROM SCOTT TO SHORTHOUSE

"There remains to be treated of . . . a very numerous, though, in general, a very insignificant class of writings known by the name of romances and novels. These may, at first view, seem too insignificant to deserve that any particular notice should be taken of them."—BLAIR'S *Rhetoric*, 1783.

I

EIGHT years or so before the above lines were written, Clara Reeve found novels and romances of sufficient importance to write a book entitled "The Progress of Romance." Of her once-famous book, "The Old English Baron," Scott wrote that "the amiable authoress" showed no rich or powerful imagination, and described her novel as an ordinary fiction of which popular superstition used to furnish a thousand instances, when nights were long, and a family assembled round an English log had little better to do than listen to such tales. There was no petty jealousy in Scott; but Horace Walpole, no doubt stung by her attempt to reduce his "Castle of Otranto" to reason and probability, said that any trial for murder at the Old Bailey would make a more interesting story than her novel. Hazlitt—not an historical novelist—described her books as "dismal treatises." "The Castle of Otranto" and "Udolpho" he treated (quite serious himself) as comic books.

Blair's contempt for fiction lasted to days still in living memory; even Ruskin seems to have wondered whether after all Scott had not done more harm than good. In my grandfather's library, to which I have previously referred, was a little book that gave me as a boy hours of mingled indignation and delight: Todd's "Students' Manual." Dr. Todd was an American Samuel Smiles, but with more than an eye

on another world than this. He was (or I found him so) sometimes stimulating; after a few doses of him one made resolutions, tried to rise earlier, mapped out schemes of work, felt that by following his counsels the world was one's oyster, waiting to yield its pearl to industry and application. But I fancy that the worthy Doctor felt more qualms than Dr. Smiles in preaching the advantage of material success; he hid in the jam of his counsels, or did not even take the trouble to hide, awful threatenings and warnings. A successful publisher told me once that a mixture of sex and religion went down best with the public. Dr. Todd, whose book passed (I believe) into many editions, had a better recipe than that for his age. Money and Religion were his two chief ingredients.

Writing about fiction, he said that he had read Fielding, Smollett, Scott, Cooper, and G. P. R. James, and even the best were "subtle snares and gilded baits" for the soul, which should be avoided like "a pestilence or a raging fire."

It will be noticed that he includes in his list three historical novelists: Sir Walter Scott, Fenimore Cooper, and G. P. R. James. James Fenimore Cooper published what is perhaps his most famous book, "The Last of the Mohicans," in 1826, when Scott's best work was done; "The Spy," which had been preceded by a non-historical novel now forgotten, appeared in 1821. He belonged to a family settled in America since the time of Charles II.; began his career as a naval officer, and made the sea, the forest, and the prairie the chief stages on which his characters played their parts. Cooper's fame extended far beyond his own country. He is still read; the other day, in a small Essex library, I discovered one of his less-known books still in circulation. But the years have revised early verdicts. When his earlier novels appeared he was hailed as the first distinguished American novelist, congratulated on having laid the foundation of American romance, and spoken of as a magician equal to Scott, Radcliffe, Walpole, and his own countryman, the earlier American

historical novelist, Charles Brockden Brown. (A curious medley of names, illustrating again the high place which Horace Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe's extravagances once held.) Victor Hugo showed his limitations as a critic by placing Cooper above Scott. In his own day he was generally known as "The American Scott" by his admiring compatriots. His work is very unequal, and he can in no sense be described as a great writer. But he had a lively imagination, considerable narrative power, a sense of tragedy and gift of depicting it without bathos; many of his descriptions of scenery are excellently done, he had an eye for the picturesque, he was wise enough to write on the life and scenes with which he was familiar, and he could, when he took the pains, draw a living character—for instance, the old Backwoodsman Natty Bumpo, "The Big Sarpent" and Long Tom Coffin. Cooper, who was a vain, quarrelsome, irritable and sometimes violent man, caused considerable excitement by a work on England which one critic has described as "a burst of vanity and ill-temper"; an earlier critic—in the *Quarterly Review*—remarked of it that "so ill-written, ill-informed, ill-bred, ill-mannered a production it has never yet been our fortune to read." James Russell Lowell referred to him as "Cooper, who's written six volumes to prove he's as good as a Lord." But he also "dealt faithfully," in the old phrase, with much in American life that did not please him; he was honest, courageous, and a clean writer of whom one would have thought even Dr. Todd would have approved. William Cullen Bryant, the first American poet, and the first American journalist of any real importance, said that Fenimore Cooper's work would only perish with the language of their country. Bryant would probably be amazed, if he could revisit the glimpses of the moon, with the way in which time has dealt with that language, that writer, and the forests and prairies so familiar to them both in the early days of their contemporary fame.

Fenimore Cooper deserves mention even in so brief a survey

of the historical novel, if only because American fiction began with the historical novel. He took his work seriously and was scrupulous about technical accuracy. In his introduction to "The Pathfinder," for instance, you will find this sentence prefacing a careful justification of his attention to the facts of history: "It may strike the novice as an anachronism to place vessels on Ontario in the middle of the eighteenth century; but, in this particular, facts will fully bear out all the license of the fiction." He was as far above Horace Walpole as below Walter Scott, even if his final words in this preface in "the wonderful means by which Providence is clearing the way for the advancement of civilization across the whole American continent" might furnish H. L. Mencken or Sinclair Lewis with a text. Montcalm, George Washington, General Burgoyne, Paul Jones, and many other characters from actual history appear in his pages.

Two notable earlier writers of historical fiction whose work still survives owe much of their inspiration to Scott: William Harrison Ainsworth and G. P. R. James. James began to write romances when he was a boy of seventeen, as a result, it seems, of reading "The Waverley Novels." Scott appears to have read his most successful novel, "Richelieu," in manuscript, and encouraged him to persevere. He wrote seventy-seven works in a hundred and ninety-eight volumes, the majority of them historical novels, though some were frankly histories; for a brief period he was Historiographer Royal to King William IV. In his novels he took great pains to be accurate, but for the most part they are melodramatic—and very often they are dull, in spite of much really careful and good work in such novels, for instance, as "Richelieu," "Agincourt" (where King Henry V. is a notable figure), and his story of Monmouth's rising, "The Fate," where Judge Jeffreys is ably drawn. Thackeray, who did harm to more than one reputation, did not help James's claim to serious consideration by his parody "Barbazure," in which the two horsemen with which James's books so often opened

were ridiculed. This opening gave a title to a recent biography of James, and it has had many imitators; only the other day an instance of a recent novel obviously copying the tradition of James came under my notice. He seems to have been taken back into favour to some extent, but no longer enjoys—or is likely to enjoy—the immense popularity which began a century ago and continued for many years. Ainsworth, in some ways a less considerable writer, has retained his popularity; his first editions (partly owing, of course, to their illustrations) have fetched high prices, and he is better known and more widely read. Quite recently a well-known critic has placed him above Kingsley, Reade, and Lytton. I do not agree with this verdict, but he is, in spite of serious faults and much distortion of fact in his books, a more important writer than is generally admitted; less accurate than James, he did undoubtedly, in some of his more popular books, take considerable pains to study and follow his authorities. I was surprised to discover this when, with the Tudor period much in my mind during the writing of a Tudor novel, I turned to "The Tower of London," and re-read it after many years. There were liberties taken with fact, but he had evidently made a close study of Lady Jane Grey, Cranmer, Ridley, Ascham, Mary and Elizabeth, and their times. "The South Sea Bubble" is another of his novels showing considerable research. Ainsworth perhaps robbed himself of an even larger early Victorian audience by his glorification of highwaymen like Dick Turpin (in "Rookwood") and Jack Sheppard. If one turns back to old encyclopædias in which he and James are mentioned, one will find far more importance given to the latter. I see that Allibone's "Critical Dictionary of English Literature" (1859, when both writers were still living, though James died in the following year) refers to "Rookwood" and "Jack Sheppard" as "works of a mischievous character which might be very appropriately published as a series under the title of "The Tyburn Plutarch"' (possibly the critic meant Petrarch), but is glad that

the author has turned over a new leaf and given up writing bad books. He is dismissed with a reproof in a few lines, while James enjoys several columns of the Dictionary, and this seems characteristic of many mid-Victorian references to their work. Adverse criticisms of James's novels were generally directed against his repetitions of himself. One reviewer said that having hit the centre of the target once, he had ever since kept firing through the same hole. Another critic, admitting this, said that one liked to know exactly what a hero, a lady-love, a villain and other familiar characters were going to do against a given background and in a given environment. Thackeray poked fun at James's productiveness. "Where is Mr. James?" he asked, in 1846. "Where is that teeming parent of romance? No tales have been advertised by his pen for time out of mind. From him who used to father a dozen volumes a year!" And then, turning to Ainsworth, "Where, finally, is the famous author upon the monthly efforts of whose genius all the country was dependent? Where is the writer of 'The Tower of London,' 'St. James's,' 'Old St. Paul's,' etc.? There is a lull, sir; a dearth of novelists."

The "Sir" was Dumas, and these comments, which ended with a plea for a continuation of "Ivanhoe" "in many, many volumes," were made in an open letter to the famous French historical novelist. Scott had not only taken an interest in James's early work; he had praised "Sir John Chiverton," his first book (1826) which was published anonymously and partially written, as it transpired, by John Partington Aston. We find Ainsworth in earlier life acting for a time as a publisher, and asking Scott, who had inspired and helped him, to contribute to an annual he issued; Scott sent him "The Bonnets of Bonnie Dundee," but laughingly handed over the twenty guineas paid for it to Lockhart's little daughter, as he had met Ainsworth at Lockhart's house. Dumas, as I have pointed out, wrote his historical novels directly under the influence of Scott, of whose "Ivanhoe,"

which had so much fascinated him, he made copious and not always legitimate use. There was another novelist of the earlier half of the nineteenth century who was largely influenced by Scott, as well as by the Gothic school which preceded Scott and at first influenced his own work: Bulwer-Lytton. Lytton, we know, steeped himself in Scott's romances when a boy at Rottingdean. He is better than James or Ainsworth, but hardly entitled to inclusion in the first rank of historical novelists, in spite of the immense popularity of such books as "The Last Days of Pompeii," "Rienzi," "Devereux"—worth reading because of its picture of England and the Continent in the second decade of the eighteenth century—and those two admirable novels, "Harold" and "The Last of the Barons." Lytton is still read, though his fame lessens with the years. His chief fault is one rare with historical novelists, or perhaps either an excess or perversion of virtue; too close and detailed an attention to history as it was taught in his day. This is especially noticeable in "The Last of the Barons," but to some extent the chaos and confusion of the time, and the general difficulty of the period, may be his excuse; it is a notable book in spite of its faults. Lytton has at least one (possibly) permanent claim to remembrance: the black evening clothes which are the livery of waiters and the hall-mark of modern civilization are the result of a passage in "Pelham." An able, industrious, widely read writer with an eye for pageantry and the picturesque, and a sense of the spectacular and epoch-making in history—not, however, very great.

Indeed, we find in the first half of the nineteenth century a remarkable gallery of historical novelists of the second rank influenced both by the Gothic novels, poems, and plays of Goethe, Schiller, Walpole, Mrs. Radcliffe, "Monk" Lewis and Godwin; and also by Scott and the two or three continental writers (Dumas, Victor Hugo, perhaps also Manzoni), who did first-class work under his partial influence. There is one writer who has given me personally many hours of

enjoyment, and who is now, I think, unduly neglected: Charles Lever. His "Tom Burke," "Charles O'Malley," and other stories of the Napoleonic era may be described as historical novels in spite of their Hibernian irresponsibility; he is, almost always, easy and delightful reading; but the present generation seems to have almost forgotten his name. At all events, I was surprised and amused, when asking some English undergraduates who had just returned from a visit to Trinity College, Dublin, whether it had altered much since Lever's time, by the confused glances and the reply from one, "It doesn't look much cleaner." Soapsuds had obliterated the memory of the author of "Harry Lorrequer" and those many rollicking yarns which amused me on long continental journeyings in my youth. Lever again is below the first rank, but still deserves to be read.

II

There are fashions in novels as in dress, and the historical novel has its periods of popularity and disfavour, like the garments it so often describes. Now and again, we know, sporadic efforts are made to revive the bustle and the crinoline; the bowler hat or "billycock" was worn in a mediæval monastery, and later (or something very like it) by Louis XI.; many of the ancient forms of hair-dressing become suddenly the rage and as suddenly are discarded. But the immense vogue of Scott's day, and the twenty years or so following his death, kept the greatest and most original of our novelists from imitating the fecundity of Ainsworth, James, Lytton, Grant, and others, and turned their efforts to other fields. Fortunately for us they could not resist occasional experiment. Fielding in the preceding century had amused himself by parodying Richardson, and had given us almost by accident his masterpiece "Tom Jones." Scott had admired the English, German, and Spanish romantics—mingling admiration with amusement—and had given the world something

immeasurably better. Dickens wrote his "Pickwick" to fit pictures, wrote "Oliver Twist" and "Nicholas Nickleby" and "The Old Curiosity Shop"—wrote "David Copperfield" in addition to books of less outstanding importance—before, in 1839, he added "The Tale of Two Cities" to his achievements. Once before he had attempted the historical novel in "Barnaby Rudge," with incomplete success. About his second historical novel and the differences of opinion on its merits I shall have a word or two to say later, but will only make this comment now: that as a novelist he was, when he wrote it, at the height of his power as of his fame; a year later "Great Expectations" appeared, and in my opinion the earlier parts of that book, never sufficiently appreciated, in themselves establish his claim to be considered one of the few very great novelists of the world's literature. Thackeray again was not primarily an historical novelist. But he fell gradually under the spell of Dumas, who, from being laughed at by him, became at last his favourite author. In 1844 Thackeray had drawn an amusing picture of Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth in conversation after a dinner at Greenwich. He entitled it "An Unpublished Romance by Alexander Dumas," and in the letterpress accompanying his sketch described how, after the whitebait had been removed, a flask of canary had been left for the Queen, and a pot of porter for her companion. In clever parody he outlines "La Jeunesse d'Elizabeth," a "Romance in Forty Volumes"; the Queen was of ravishing beauty, with red hair, like all the English, and fifty-six years old—in the golden harvest of life. The poet sat at her feet gazing at the navies of England, St. Paul's, the Tower, the Monument, the hills of Canterbury, and the Scottish mountains. He breathes his name—"William"—and the story ends with her begging him to call her "Betsi." In 1852 Thackeray gave us his own immortal "Esmond." "Barry Lyndon" had preceded it by nine years—a tale which might have brought down upon him the strictures of Allibone on Ainsworth's rascals—but a fine story,

nevertheless—and in "Vanity Fair" he had given us some memorable pictures of the Waterloo campaign; which, however, was contemporary with his own early childhood. But in Dickens, Thackeray, Kingsley, we have, I think, writers who become historical novelists incidentally and almost by accident; unlike Scott, Dumas, James, Ainsworth, and others one might name, from whose pens the historical novel seemed inevitable. Another very great historical novel, "The Cloister and the Hearth," surprises us even more by its authorship. A writer keenly interested in his own day, rather than in the past, gave us for lasting enjoyment and instruction one of the most glorious reconstructions of the Middle Ages we possess. Mr. Hugh Walpole has called Reade a minor novelist. "The Cloister and the Hearth" raises him to the front rank. George Eliot was less successful with "Romola." It is a *tour de force* which has done little to advance her fame; interesting as many parts of "Romola" are, she was working on alien soil.

The Golden Age of the historical novel began with "Waverley" and ended within a quarter of a century of Scott's death, somewhere in the fifties of last century. But Dumas was still writing; Hugo was still writing; and now and again a novel of real importance and lasting merit made its appearance. Blackmore, in 1869, had a belated and quite unanticipated success (the result of the accidental coincidence of the Marquis of Lorne's marriage) with "Lorna Doone"; his "Springhaven," a tale of the days of Nelson, did not appear until 1887, and is almost forgotten, though he himself placed it high above the one famous book which made his name and by which he is remembered. In the seventies the historical novel, which had fallen into disfavour, again became fashionable for a time. It has suffered innumerable vicissitudes and has only recently, after a long period of neglect which drove many historical novelists for a time into more profitable fields, come back owing largely to the amazing —and inordinate—success of "Jew Süss." I say inordinate;

though Feuchtwanger's book would not have attained anything like its present fame without real merits, just as the resemblance of "Lorna" to "Lorne" could, in itself, never have made Blackmore's book "as good as clotted cream, almost," to Devonshire folk—and to many others. In the same way that curiosity of historical literature, "John Inglesant," remains a great book to me in spite of the recent discoveries of Mr. W. K. Fleming. Perhaps one should say "a great mosaic," as it is largely built of fragments from other men's work, most cunningly pieced together—and quite unblushingly. The reputation of its author has suffered, as it deserves to suffer. When one remembers Shorthouse's secretiveness during the ten-year task of writing—and assembling—the one book by which he is remembered, and how each evening the author, born and bred a Birmingham Quaker in a chemical manufacturer's home, but now a High Anglican mystic, stammered out to an admiring wife the solitary paragraph which was his day's work, one cannot help wondering whether this secrecy was deliberate, and guilty. It is amusing to read Henry Scott Holland's unconsciously correct criticism today: "he feasted himself on the delight of searching out the most delicate and exquisite expression." It is amazing that he was not found out before. And yet "John Inglesant," mosaic though so much of it is, remains a great and one may even say original book.

VI.—STEVENSON AND AFTER

" Stories to rede are delitabill
Suppose that they be nocht but fabill."
JOHN BARBOUR: *The Bruce.*

I

R. D. BLACKMORE said that he called " Lorna Doone " a romance, because the incidents, characters, time, and scenery were alike romantic, and in shaping an old tale he neither dared nor desired to claim for his book the dignity of an historic novel, or cumber it with the difficulties of one. Perhaps Stevenson in most of his novels where history is introduced might, if " Lorna Doone " be taken as an example of romance, be described as one of the romantics—he is certainly in this sense more royal than his " King of the Romantics," Sir Walter Scott. " Kidnapped," as he admits himself, wanders away from fact; " The Master of Ballantrae," though it begins with the Forty-five, drifts far away from it; his Alan Breck is a little fellow, and not the bigger Breck of fact; " The Black Arrow," though perhaps more strictly historical in intention, is, to my mind, as it was to his own, one of the least successful of his books. And yet Stevenson—loving the great writers of historic fiction and steeped in them—was essentially an historical novelist himself. We find proofs of this in many of his short stories: in " St. Ives," where he paid close attention to recorded facts connected with the period (1813 and just after) with which he was concerned, and in " Weir of Hermistoun," the other book unfinished by his pen. In " Weir of Hermistoun," torso as it is, we have his most splendid work, and on the evidence of that alone I cannot help feeling that when Stevenson died at so early an age we

lost a writer who would have given us in time an historical novel to rank with the very greatest. Conrad's "Suspense," also unfinished, gave promise of being the great Napoleonic novel for which, in spite of so much excellent work on that period, we still wait. One wishes Hardy had written it as a companion to his "Dynasts." As it is, Stevenson's work in this field is chiefly romance, and largely promise. No one book stands out as supreme and complete with "Henry Esmond," "The Cloister and the Hearth," "Notre Dame," "The Three Musketeers," "I Promessi Sposi," or "The Charterhouse of Parma." He chose romantic backgrounds, characters, periods, but gave no very clear-cut picture as a whole; one remembers figures and scenes—standing out very vividly, it is true—in the midst of vague wanderings and fightings. If I think of his novels it is to remember them in parts rather than as complete books; the fight in the roundhouse, the patter of Catriona's feet on the cobbles of a Dutch quay, a hiding in the heather, the dancing of Tod Lapraik, the duel in the shrubbery in "The Master of Ballantrae."

Sir Walter Besant, with a keen love for the picturesque in history, did some excellent work—but not in the very first rank—in "Dorothy Forster" and "The Orange Girl," and (with James Rice) in "The Chaplain of the Fleet," and other books. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "White Company" —the first part magnificent, the second perhaps a little confused and crowded—should not be forgotten, though it is nearly forty years since its publication; in some ways I think his "Rodney Stone," a tale of Brighton and London in Regency days, an even better book taken as a whole. Marion Crawford wrote an excellent novel in "Marietta," though he disclaims absolute fidelity to fact, and a still finer in his story of old Spain, "In the Palace of the King." He wrote, by the way, an interesting little monograph on "The Novel—What it is," in which he described his attitude to his own art, laying down the rule that a novel should

be above all "a pocket theatre" designed to amuse and interest. George Meredith, now falling into undeserved neglect, was not primarily an historical novelist, but wrote one fine historical novel at least in "Vittoria," dealing with the uprising against the Austrians in Italy. Emile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian achieved a wide popularity in collaboration for their novels on more recent French history. Sir Gilbert Parker, happily still writing, did some excellent early work on Canada and the Channel Islands; a book which has actual history for its *raison d'être*, though it may perhaps not be considered a strictly historical novel, seems to me his best—his delightful and touching little story "When Valmond Came to Pontiac," the story of a supposed son of Napoleon. Ranger Gull, whose "When It Was Dark," written under the name of "Guy Thorne," had a colossal success as a best-seller years ago, surprised some readers, myself among them, by the excellence of an historical novel written in an entirely different vein and under his own name; a story of Stephen's reign, entitled "The Serf," which, though it is marred by long discursions and moralizings, shows careful study, and gives an admirable picture of those days of anarchy and of the Fenlands in the twelfth century. Thomas Hardy's fame was established by novels not in any way historical, but I am inclined to think that, unlike Meredith, and unlike Trollope, who turned their attention for a fleeting moment to history, he was first and foremost an historical novelist. Many of his short stories deal with history; "The Trumpet-Major," published just half a century ago, is an historical novel; and in his poems—but most notably, of course, in "The Dynasts"—one sees a mind brooding constantly and wistfully over the past and its glamour and sadness. A novelist once very widely read but now, possibly, in danger of being forgotten, is John Oliver Hobbes (Mrs. Pearl Craigie), whose "School for Saints" and "Robert Orange" certainly deserve remembrance.

Maurice Hewlett and Stanley Weyman stand out for especial mention in comparatively recent English historical fiction. I am inclined to think that Hewlett is entitled to take first place among later writers, in spite of his mannerisms, which unfortunately have been imitated by some recent and promising writers to their own detriment. In their own setting and by their own creator we can accept them without much demur. "Richard Yea-and-Nay" seems to me one of the few historical novels of comparatively recent years by an English pen which deserves to stand permanently among the masterpieces of fiction. The death of Bernard Capes in 1914 robbed us of another fine if difficult writer; and another great loss, in 1907, was the poet-novelist Miss Mary E. Coleridge, the author of that glorious book "The King With Two Faces." Mrs. Flora Annie Steel's death is more recent, but it is more than thirty years since her great novel of the Mutiny, "On the Face of the Waters," caused a sensation in the literary world. On the continent we have lost (1904) Maurus Jókai, (1910) Tolstoy, (1911) Fogazzaro, and (1916) Sienkiewicz. Merezhkovsky is still with us; his "Forerunner," a story of Leonardo da Vinci, is the finest reproduction I know of the life of Florence in the closing years of the fifteenth century and earlier years of the sixteenth. In Scandinavia Verner von Heidenstam wrote a memorable book in "The Charles Men."

Spanish America has a romantic writer who modelled his work on that of Scott, in José Marmol, and one of the most popular books in South America is Enrique Larreta's Weymanesque story of the days of Philip of Spain, "La Gloria de Don Ramiro." The United States has been handicapped by the fact that its origin is even now comparatively so recent. The pioneers were too busy with their spade-work in building up a new power, and too much concerned with the hard facts of their struggle for existence, to trouble themselves with fiction, though their earlier

writers found time to wrangle in books and pamphlets about invisible worlds. Fiction began with the gruesome stories of Charles Brockden Brown, and the work of his earlier successors had as backgrounds the native forests, lakes, wildernesses, and seas. Fenimore Cooper's descriptions of forest scenery are, to me, among the most pleasing features of his work; he could paint a good background; though how much better it could be painted may be seen by reading Nathaniel Hawthorne in, for instance, "The Scarlet Letter." Compare with anything by Cooper the passage from Hawthorne describing Pearl in the woods:

"The great black forest—stern as it showed itself to those who brought the guilt and trouble of the world into its bosom—became the playmate of the lonely infant, as well as it knew how. Sombre as it was, it put on the kindliest of its moods to welcome her. It offered her the partridge-berries, the growth of the preceding autumn, but ripening only in the spring, and now red as drops of blood upon the withered leaves."

The description following of the small wild denizens of the wilderness is delightful. "The Scarlet Letter," if not fully entitled to the name of historical novel, at least was founded on a fragment of history; in an early American diary is found this record:

"*Robert Cole, having been oft punished for drunkenness, was now ordered to wear a red D about his neck for a year*" (1633).

Perhaps this famous book may best be called romantic psychology or psychological romance; it has at all events the merit of being literature, and this cannot be said of the majority of the work which has passed and passes in the States for historical fiction. When Hawthorne wrote the Puritan influence was still strong; it is not without significance that the first book published in America—in 1640—was a book of psalms. Kennedy Tucker wrote with some success an Old Dominion life; G. W. Cable's stories

of the old Creole days and Lousiana delighted many readers. In spite of Fenimore Cooper's vigorous and often jingoistic patriotism, the comparatively early American novelists were regional rather than nationalistic, and the best work took special districts for its background. The War of Independence and the Civil War have naturally engaged the pens of innumerable writers; and others—for instance, the American "Jane Austin"—have dealt with the Pilgrim Fathers and the earliest days. Herman Melville introduces characters from history into "Israel Potter." But there has been much good, and much indifferent or actually bad work done by American novelists dealing with countries beyond the States, and days earlier than the beginning of their own history. One is a little struck by the tendency to get back beyond the dawn of carefully authenticated history, as in Ware's "Zenobia," General Lew Wallace's florid and carelessly written, but immensely popular "Ben Hur," or William Henry Babcock's much more careful and serious "Cian of the Chariots," a romance of King Arthur's Court. Mark Twain's "Yankee at the Court of King Arthur"—that distressing book which has lately been providing provincial hoardings with pictorial travesties of Malory—is prefaced by its author with a word of explanation; he says, "The ungentle laws and customs touched upon in this tale are historical, and the episodes which are used to illustrate them are also historical." Byron remarked that Cervantes smiled away Spain's chivalry; this is an elaborate attempt to grin away an earlier chivalry by the introduction of an American at Camelot; a somewhat crudely constructed "transposition of epochs—and bodies," bringing together the very old and the (then) very new. How much better and how much more delicately a somewhat similar transposition can be carried out may be seen by a comparison of "A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur," with Sir Henry Newbolt's "The Old Country." "Exactly as I would speak of my nearest personal friends or enemies, or

my most familiar neighbours," says the visitor to Warwick Castle who encounters the wandering Yankee, "he spoke of Sir Bedivere, Sir Bors de Ganis, Sir Launcelot of the Lake, Sir Galahad, and all the other great names of the Table Round." In the tale that follows we have knights on bicycles, knights with advertisements of Persimmon's soap or Petersen's prophylactic toothbrushes painted on tabards; knights in top-hats. This book is an American "Don Quixote," vastly inferior, of course, to the great masterpiece of which the author had evidently made some careful study—as is evident in the episode of the pigs and other references to enchantments. There are, in Mark Twain's book, both humanity and humour—of its kind—he preaches constantly—there are frequent diatribes against monarchy, and he is quite as anxious as Fenimore Cooper to show that he is as good as a lord and, indeed—all men being equal, and the British nobility being notably unpopular in the States—considerably better; it is true that when King Arthur is stripped of his trappings he is shown to be chivalrous and human. (The King's humanity to the small-pox patient, however, suggests a sequel in an epidemic; Mark Twain seems to have overlooked the fact that much kissing of small-pox patients is not in the public interests.) Cervantes had not the heart to let his Canon destroy all his romances, and he loved these while he laughed at them. Mark Twain is far more ruthless, and yet evidently loved Malory while ridiculing him cruelly and crudely.

II

The strange thing is that here, in perhaps the world's greatest humorist, who has made more people laugh than any man who has ever lived, we have really, with all his limitations, a writer potentially and almost in fact a great historical novelist; I am near to saying the greatest the States have produced. There are hints of it everywhere in this

book which, for many reasons, I am singling out for special mention ; not, of course, because it is itself a serious historical novel in any sense. But the greatest humorists have almost, if not always, allied to the gift of humour a gift of tears. One knows the famous story of the clown Grimaldi, recommended to himself by a doctor as a cure for melancholy. The fool of Shakespeare and the old dramatists—the fool of actual history, the younger Caillette of Francis the First's time being the supreme instance—had a sense of the underlying grimness, sadness, transitoriness of life. Very often, because the essence of humour and wit is contrast, the laughable is founded on melancholy. W. W. Jacobs has written in "The Monkey's Paw" one of the grimmest and most touching short stories in our literature. J. M. Barrie can bring two kinds of tears to the eyes. So could Zangwill, Barry Pain, Jerome—and so can still (one is glad to think) Pett Ridge. Mark Twain, who could write "The Jumping Frog," and give us Fergusson the guide, could also write that gripping little story of the Swiss dead-house, when a mortuary-keeper finds that a man recalled to life is his deadly enemy, and lets him die.

Reviewing at the time of its appearance "Life on the Mississippi," a leading American paper said that it was only secondarily the world of a funny man, but primarily was descriptive and historical work by an ex-pilot of the old Mississippi sort, forming a valuable and entertaining record of a past phase of American life. Samuel L. Clemens had the feeling for history, though, when he attacked the tales of romance and chivalry, he did not, like the character in "Don Quixote," branch off suddenly into a glowing description of what they should and might be. It is significant, nevertheless, that his own favourite among his works was "The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc by the Sieur Louis de Conte," the result of twelve years' work. This has been described as a prose epic ; it is certainly, with many faults and limitations, a fine book. Like Bernard Shaw he was

handicapped by his own personality—and even more handicapped, no doubt, by the clash of the modern American against the descendant of old civilizations. When Joan wants to ride on the back of a cow round the meadow, we are brought up sharply by the modernity of her having to wait "for the next cow" on failing to jump upon the back of one she has selected. But in "Joan of Arc" a deliberate effort is made to treat the past and its superstitions with reverence and understanding. S. L. Clemens cannot altogether help preaching, even though his preaching would not commend itself to the Puritans with whom American literature began. In "The Prince and the Pauper" he begins to preach by reproducing the letter from Latimer on Edward the Sixth's birth in which God is verily "an English God," and his Prince has to re-enter the world naked, as his King Arthur re-enters the world divested of the advantages of rank and state. But "The Prince and the Pauper" shows careful study of the period and its conditions, and of the ceremonial of the court as of the life of the poor in London at that date; it is serious historical fiction, if the plot is without foundation in fact. W. D. Howells made the amazing suggestion that he should have "drolled out" the court ceremonials!

I have referred at some length to "A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur" because, though it has no great importance as an historical or pseudo-historical novel, I think it has considerable importance as a text-book for those interested in the art and practice of historical fiction to study. A careful examination of it will suggest what the historical novelist should avoid, though here and there are also hints as to what he might do, by imitation, to bring verisimilitude to his work. After reading this novel, which has to its credit some excellent descriptions, he will probably be careful to strip some of the false illusions from the past; all was not gold that glittered, and the naked children in the hamlets, the misery of the slaves, the barbarities and

stupidities of the criminal laws, were as much a part of the past as its external pomp and splendour and graciousness and chivalries. The other day I read over again "The Loyal Servant's" eulogy of Bayard, the noblest and most picturesque figure in chivalry; a perfect knight, without fear or reproach, who can still move us to admiration and wonder. Nothing is more charming than the description of his courtesy and humanity to the lady and her fair young daughters at Milan, and it is delightful to read today of the girls working their gifts for him during his illness and presenting them bashfully—the pretty neat bracelets of fine gold and silver threads, and the purse of crimson satin most curiously wrought. But when his servant (Bayard being no saint) brings a young girl one night for his amusement, and he talks to the mother who has sold her, and reproaches her that she should have done this thing, and sends the girl home, I noticed the significant fact, which had previously escaped me, that he reproached her because it was a shame for a lady of gentle birth to do this thing; for a poor country woman he would evidently have had no reproaches. Mark Twain, if he had come upon this passage, would have found a useful text for his attack on our conceptions of the chivalrous past.

The chief use of Mark Twain's book, however, is that here you have the Wardour Street novel reduced to an intentional absurdity. Even in "Barbazure," Thackeray himself did not parody it so successfully. The parody of G. P. R. James might often be a direct transcript from some novel by the original writer. It does not seem very much out of place when "with that scream which is terrible in a strong man in agony, the brave knight Romane de Clos-Vougeot" sinks back at hearing of his lady-love's marriage, and falls from his charger to the ground, a lifeless mass of steel. It is true that the "bung" which was foil to the unknown Knight's spear tears a hole in illusion, but one can imagine James, or Ainsworth, writing of the flaunting

feather in the barret-cap, the prancing Andalusian palfrey, the surcoat of peach-coloured samite and a purfled doublet of vair, the pea-green doublet, slashed with orange-tawny—or at all events of garments and equipments very like them. Mark Twain took as his examples novels of less merit, and rubs in the absurdities. Clarence the page sums them all up when he says, "Marry, we shall have it again, that same old weary tale that he hath told a thousand times in the same words, and that he will tell till he dieth, every time he hath gotten his barrel full and feeleth his exaggeration-mill a-working. Would God I had died or I saw this day."

And so, in this book, when the knight rides up to ask, "Fair sir, will ye just?" the American answers, "Will I which?" and, on explanation, threatens to report his adversary if he does not get back to his circus; we see Camelot taken for an asylum, and when the serving-man begins, "Marry, fair sir, meseemeth——" the Yankee interrupts, "That will do, I reckon you are a patient." Notice how he tries to intercept a passer-by who says, "Prithee, do not let me——"

"Let you *what*?"

"Hinder me, then, if the word please thee better." Tournaments, pilgrimages, and scourgings, the church and the law, all the outstanding features of the Middle Ages, earlier and later, are dealt with in much this fashion. If I were teaching a class to write historical novels and to avoid Wardour Street, to avoid the intrusion of personal views and prejudices and opinions, but at the same time to avoid covering the past with a glamour untrue to facts as we know them, I should be inclined to suggest this book for study, with a caution, and with a corrective in the shape of a first-class historical novel by some recent writer who has mastered his or her craft. It would be interesting to have a companion novel describing Sir Galahad or Sir Bors or Sir Bedivere in modern New York. But Mark Twain

did not let his country-folk off without a sly dig here and there; he speaks of the way in which our Mansion House was built, by nominating Dissenters—who were by law ineligible—to the office of Sheriff, and fining them heavily for not serving. "The aldermen, who without any question, were Yankees in disguise," he says, "hit upon this neat device," and kept it up until they had collected £15,000 in fines.

After the war with Spain, a great deal of historical fiction was produced in the United States, much of it of little merit or value. There has been some good work, and some that has enjoyed a success out of proportion to its merits. "When Knighthood was in Flower," by Charles Major, earned a large measure of popularity. The American Winston Churchill found an appreciative audience for "Richard Carvel" and other quite able and interesting books, written in the good tradition of the English masters, though they are for the most part panoramic views of American history and almost painfully close to documented fact. In his own country he has been criticized for erring too far on the side of accuracy, and one reviewer, Mr. Frederic Taber, has an interesting note on this. "Regarding the literal accuracy of historical novels in general and of Mr. Churchill's in particular," he says, "those critics may quibble to whom the letter seems more essential than the spirit . . . there are episodes in 'Richard Carvel' and in 'The Crisis' and 'The Crossing' as well that narrowly escape the weariness of the historical monograph, and make one wish that the author had burned his library and relied upon the sheer force of his imagination. 'Les Trois Mousquetaires' had a scant allowance of historical accuracy, but it had what was far more essential—a generous supply of real flesh and blood." Too great attention to historical accuracy is not so common a fault, in American or even in English fiction, that it may not easily be forgiven, and I think "Richard Carvel" is far more than a matter of dry bones clad in antique dress.

Owen Wister in "The Virginian" painted some notable and lovable characters, and gave an admirable reconstruction of the life of the Wild West half a century or so ago; he is hardly as good a craftsman as Winston Churchill, and his one great book is very loosely constructed. Ellen Glasgow wrote an interesting novel of old Virginia before and during the Civil War in "The Battle Ground." Robert W. Chambers has made many readable contributions to fiction of this class, and a few other notable names—out of very many—are Mrs. Andrews (author of an excellent Napoleonic novel, "The Marshal"), Irving Bacheller, Frank Harris, Mary S. Watts, Edith Wharton, Gertrude Atherton, Booth Tarkington, and Joseph Hergesheimer—an unequal writer, but sometimes extraordinarily good. Much excellent work has been done; yet it would be difficult to name, I think, any one historical novel of outstanding eminence and importance like "Esmond," "The Cloister and the Hearth," "The Three Musketeers," "Notre Dame," "War and Peace," or "I Promessi Sposi." This will come.

III

Publishers move in mysterious ways their wonders to perform, and some in ways more mysterious than others. I was amused and somewhat amazed to find a very eulogistic notice of one of my own historical novels bracketed by a publisher with an eulogistic notice of another historical novel, also published by his firm, in which it was stated that the second historical novelist was perhaps the only historical novelist now living. My difficulty in dealing even briefly with contemporary novelists is that there are so many, and so many who, if not comparable to the greatest of the past, are so very good. There are perhaps not many giants in the land; Great Britain cannot point to a new Scott, a Thackeray, a Dickens; France to a Dumas or a Hugo; Italy to a Manzoni; Russia to a Tolstoy. But the

stature of those who people what Matthew Arnold called "the phantasmagorical world of novels" (he added, "and of opium") has grown greater. Swift exclaimed with admiration that his Emperor of Liliput was at least the thickness of a thumb-nail taller than his subjects. I cannot judge so precisely.

And so I am not going to attempt to size and number my contemporaries as one sizes and numbers a regiment. Some who ought to be there would be forgotten, and some——

Well, during the War there were at one time daily thefts of mutton, in the form of whole carcasses, from a French port where Chinese labour battalions were working. An acquaintance of mine tells me that he detected the method employed, and put a stop to it. In the dusk, under the eyes of many watchers, the Chinese smuggled out sheep after sheep by clapping on the carcass a Chinese hat and jacket, squeezing their mutton between them in the ranks, and marching him out. For a long time no one had suspected that the diminutive Chinaman had once worn a fleece.

I should leave out some who deserve mention, allow passage to some whose selection I might find it hard to justify if challenged, and turn a fragment of this book into a page from a directory or year-book.

Modern writers who are my own contemporaries must find casual mention throughout this book in illustration of what I have to say. . . . But I make no promise that here and there you may not find a string of names, and many a name which should be mentioned must of necessity be excluded.

VII.—THE GERM AND THE PLOT

"A little Plote of my simple penning."—Lord Darnley (1554).

I

That indefatigable antiquary, folklorist, historian, ecclesiast and writer of historical (and other) fiction, the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould, made it a rule to read no reviews, and possibly because of that his work suffered. George Henry Lewes, treating George Eliot much as if she were a Grand Lama, was careful to keep from her knowledge any adverse criticisms of her work. Charles Dickens read very few novels. When he wrote "A Tale of Two Cities" he was staggered (as I have already said) at the cart-load of books on the Revolution sent to his door in response to his suggestion by Carlyle.

I think myself that anyone anxious to attempt the historical novel will be well advised to know nothing of an *Index Expurgatorius*. Victor Hugo's mother was wiser than her world thought her when she allowed her boy to roam at large among books, good, indifferent, and bad. It is useful to know what has been done in the same field, to trace origins and developments, and to study criticisms. One should, of course, be ready to criticize the critics, some of whom I propose to criticize by and by. A wide reading of the historical novel in all its stages aided by the estimates of men competent to judge is immensely useful. One can see how this writer and that have dealt with situations, problems, difficulties; one can distinguish between failure and success, and perhaps see the causes of each.

I have endeavoured to trace very roughly the development of the historical novel from the early legends, anecdotes, *chansons de geste*, and mediæval romances, to the present day,

because I am convinced that many writers fail through ignorance of the work that has preceded them. One need not be a sedulous ape, but example, good or bad, is better than precept where it is a case of avoiding pit-falls, or attempting to do better than the best. There have been very great historical novels. The perfect historical novel has never yet been written, and may never be. It must preserve the merits and avoid the demerits of the great writers, and even then draw something from lesser writers where the great have failed. It must preserve dignity and avoid grandiloquence, preserve atmosphere and avoid the archaic carried to extremes, preserve accuracy of background and avoid the crowding out of the human interest, preserve strength and avoid the needlessly coarse and ruthless and morbid, preserve the dramatic without being melodramatic, preserve proportion without sacrificing detail. Whether it will ever be written I do not know. There is no great historical novel without obvious and even glaring faults. Those who essay this form will, unless by a miracle, fail themselves; but at least they should at the outset attempt the miracle of throwing the rope of the wagon across a star.

II

An eminent historian writing of the Middle Ages has said that every country has possessed in its own primeval literature the first germ of romance. Just as in the rude epic of our forefathers, in the snatch of song in which modern rhyme was preceded by primitive means of arresting the ear, in the nursery tale or legend with its simple but often very effective plot (take, for instance, the ancient story of the spinning girl helped by, and then circumventing, the power of evil) are to be found the germs of our modern historical fiction, so each novel begins in the mind of its author with a germ from which the whole book is finally to grow. I remember having a long discussion once on this subject with an historical novelist who endeavoured to show how different books had sprung from

a still-traceable germ, and held the theory that every great book could be set down in essence in a few words. A post-card (it was urged) ought to hold even "The Grand Cyrus." Recently I was reminded of this by a reference in Lytton to authors who take the germs of their novels from history, and by another comment by a critic that the germ of a novel and the content of it should be reducible to a dozen or a score of words.

How does any historical novel, great or small, have its origin and take shape and bulk from that first beginning?

Lytton wrote himself, in another passage, "To my mind a writer should sit down to compose a fiction as a painter prepares to compose a picture. His first care should be the conception of a whole as lofty as intellect can grasp." Stevenson said, "A work of art is first cloudily conceived in the mind." One of our most popular modern novelists has said that the idea of his most famous book came to him from a train journey and the sight of someone sitting opposite him in the carriage round whom a hazy story began to weave itself. In "The Young Duke" Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield) gave a receipt for writing a novel: "Take a pair of pistols, a pack of cards, a cookery-book, and a set of new quadrilles; mix them up with half an intrigue and a whole marriage, and divide them into three equal portions." (It was, of course, the day of the three-decker.) Alexander Pope once wrote a recipe for an epic poem, treating it as if a plum-pudding were in the making; an important ingredient was the "fable" or plot, which could be taken out of any "old poem, history book, romance, or legend."

We have in a Book of Memoranda by Charles Dickens the germ of "A Tale of Two Cities," but it would be impossible to construct from it the novel as it finally appeared; his first idea, which could easily go onto a postcard, ran:

"*How as to a story in two periods—with a lapse of time between, like a French drama?*"

This first indefinite " germ-idea " was followed by " Titles for such a notion." He had always great difficulties with his titles, and took immense, though certainly not wasted, time in making a final choice. Here are the first efforts at a title for the story in two periods which became the " Tale of Two Cities " :

" Time ! The Leaves of the Forest. Scattered Leaves. The Great Wheel. Round and Round. Old Leaves. So Long Ago. Far Apart. Fallen Leaves. Five and Twenty Years. Years and Years. Rolling Years. Day after Day. Felled Trees. Memory Carton. Rolling Stones. Two Generations."

For some time the idea was laid aside, though evidently a book was shaping gradually. " One of These Days," " Buried Alive," " The Thread of Gold," " The Doctor of Beauvais," were considered and rejected. In March, 1859, he wrote " This is to certify that I have got exactly the name for the story that is wanted ; exactly what will fit the opening to a T : A Tale of Two Cities."

Alexandre Dumas attached far more importance to the idea and conception of a novel than to the actual execution ; this, he thought, of quite minor importance. Before putting pen to paper he gave the closest attention to the planning of his book. When success had come to him, he would lie silent for days, it is said, on the deck of his yacht imagining, thinking, planning, until the plot had taken clear shape from the germinal idea, and everything had been carefully arranged. He wrote very rapidly when the actual penmanship began. Once he accepted a challenge to prove this ; he was to write the first volume of the " Chevalier de Maison Rouge " (the plot having already matured) in sixty-two hours, including sufficient time for sleep and food ; the book was to fill seventy-five pages, with forty-five lines to each page. He finished his task in less than the appointed time. Some of his historical novels were built up from an anecdote.

The greatest difficulty which any novelist, but especially

the historical novelist, has to face is the difficulty of selection. What the Right Hon. H. A. L. Fisher said recently about the art of literature consisting in omissions seems to me not only tersely put but important and, to a large extent, true. As a matter of fact, Stevenson had said the same thing. It is not, or should not be, hard to find the germ or even the plot for novels. It is hard to find the germ or plot for *a* novel. When a journalist complained to Lord Northcliffe about the difficulty of finding ideas for articles, he was told that a bus-ride down Fleet Street ought to supply ideas enough to fill a newspaper; which is perfectly true, given the eye that can see what the ordinary eye misses. O. Henry said that you had only to knock at any door and say "All is discovered!" to find a story. In every period of history, in every episode, in a fragment of stone, in an old weapon, in a name on a desolate grave, in a scrap of verse, is the germ of an historical novel. The difficulty is, or should be, selection. The selection of title is a difficulty. The selection of character and incident is a difficulty. And it is as important to know what to reject as what to select.

Perhaps I may be forgiven here if, by way of illustration, I give some scraps from my own experience. The germ of my first novel, "The Red Cravat," lay in a paragraph in Carlyle's "Frederick the Great," where Frederick William of Prussia gives a letter to a girl which is really an order for her instant marriage to one of his giant grenadiers; she discovers or suspects this, and hands it to an old woman who is promptly married when it is delivered. In my book the grenadier became English, the letter or order after vicissitudes secured his marriage to an English girl with whom he was in love. (But almost always one wanders much farther than this from the germinal idea, which sometimes, when the book is finished, seems altogether lost. The Red King cried out, when Alice, coming through the Looking Glass, took hold of the end of his pencil, "It writes all manner of things that I don't intend.") "Running Horse Inn" began with the idea of

writing a novel round a little wooden inn I knew at Herne Bay, calling it by another name, and part of the germinal idea included a certain episode in a trial for murder, early in the nineteenth century, when a scrap of torn newspaper used as the wad of a gun proved guilt. " The Rise of Ledgar Dunstan " and " The Quest of Ledgar Dunstan " were based on the hypothesis that the world war might have been the secret and unintentional work of one obscure individual. " A Son of the Manse " might have been summed up in a few words as a study of the results in certain cases of harsh, procincial Nonconformity on sensitive natures. Consciously or unconsciously it undoubtedly owed something to George Douglas Brown's powerful but gloomy " The House with the Green Shutters." " The Autobiography of Judas Iscariot " was inspired by a scrap of legend and a little story by Anatole France. " Brave Earth " was the result of a paragraph read in an old copy of *Baker's Chronicle* picked up on a Cambridge bookstall. This paragraph described the unexpected fate of a Bodmin man during the Western Insurrection under Humphry Arundell in 1549, but the novel drifted far beyond this one episode, which had, in the end, no essential connection with the plot or book. " Here Comes an Old Sailor " was based on an old legend; the scenes were placed chiefly at Fordwich, because that tiny forgotten port of Canterbury had caught my imagination during a visit long before the book came to be written. " Queen Dick " first began to take shape after reading some verses about " Queen Dick "—Richard Cromwell—among some contemporary tracts and broadsheets.

In every case, the book itself was, in the end, very different from my first intention—in more ways, unfortunately, than one. In my short stories germinal ideas have come, I find on reflection, from the suggestions of friends (one was based on a description of the game of Pool) on a chance remark made by a chambermaid in a French hotel about a neighbouring circus, on newspaper paragraphs, on a journey in the tube

when the lights went out suddenly and unexpectedly, on memories attached to a certain old wooden seat at a watering-place long ago, on scraps in old chronicles and histories, on an incident in school life which I transferred to Napoleonic days, with grown men instead of boys for the actors. There is no reason to reject anything because one finds it first in a modern setting. What happens in a modern liner may (unless one is attempting another story like "The Ship that Found Herself"—and perhaps even then) be made to happen in a Spanish galleon, a Cinque-Port ship, a Viking-ship, a coracle. A train may become a stage coach. A tank of today's warfare may be the wooden horse of Troy.

I do not know whether it is the experience of most authors that books drift very far from the first intention, but probably in the majority of cases the final result is far indeed from the preliminary nutshell form, or even from a carefully elaborated plot. With Scott this was certainly the case, though he was careful to warn young writers that he did not advise them to imitate his own methods. He said often that he could never adhere to a written-out careful plot; ideas rose as he wrote. When he was at work on "Woodstock"—a novel which I have heard one distinguished critic describe as the best of Scott's novels, though I am far from agreeing with him—he reports in his *Journal*, "This morning I had some good ideas respecting Woodstock which will make the story better. The devil of a difficulty is that one puzzles the skein in order to excite curiosity, and then cannot disentangle it for the satisfaction of the prying fiend they have raised." On the 12th of February, 1826, he wrote again: "Having ended the second volume of 'Woodstock' last night I have to begin the third this morning. Now I have not the slightest idea how the story is to be wound up to a catastrophe. I am just in the same case as I used to be when I lost myself in former days in some country to which I was a stranger. I always pushed for the pleasantest road, and either found or made it the nearest. . . . I only tried to make that which I was

actually writing diverting and interesting, leaving the rest to fate. A perilous style, but I cannot help it. I would not have young writers imitate my carelessness, however."

In spite of his faults and foibles, Scott was too essentially modest to be unaware of his own faults; or of many of them. While engaged on one of his novels he broke off to have a nap, first urging his readers to do the same—at all events, in his "Journal," to which he confided his difficulties and dissatisfactions. Publication in parts, or in three-volume form, itself led to a certain looseness in the work of most of our earlier novelists. J. R. Lowell once said that he himself could not write a novel, nor conceive how anyone else was able to, and he would sooner be hanged than begin to print anything before he had wholly finished it. "Moreover," he added, "what can a man do when he is a treadmill?" Scott, when ill-health and his noble effort to redeem his fortunes made his work largely a treadmill business, certainly wrote many a careless and dreary page, but I think there is still some truth in what a once popular Scottish writer, Mrs. Grant of Laggan, who knew him well, wrote. Quoting an old proverb of the North, "King's caff is better than ither folks' corn," she said: "Though the 'caff' (chaff) may abound, it is still *King's* caff."

III

The first thing, then, in writing an historical novel is the germ from which it is to grow into something which may—or may not—bear some final resemblance to its origin; a "germ" which may be reducible to writing in a few words, or may be almost formless, like Stevenson's cloudy conception in the mind. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was at once more and less an historical novelist because, as someone has written of him, he saw *everything* double, and never saw the surface of things without seeing beneath the surface, wrote down carefully in brief abstract his stories before he set seriously to work;

here, for instance, are a few of the ideas he jotted down in his notes for tales and essays:

"The History of an Almshouse in a country village from the eve of its foundation downwards." (He elaborates this postcard "germ" by suggesting the vicissitudes of fortune such a history might show; the rich of one generation becoming the poor of the next; perhaps the son and heir of the founder being glad to enter as an inmate; a gleam of occasional sunshine being given to the tale by the good fortune of some inmate, for instance a nameless infant being discovered the child of wealthy parents.)

"A young woman in England poisoned by an East Indian barbed dart which her brother had brought home as a curiosity."

"A story, the principal characters of which shall always seem on the point of entering on the scene, but shall never appear."

"For a child's story—imagine all sorts of wonderful playthings."

The world is so full of a number of things that every way one turns there are novels and short stories for those with eyes to see, and all the world's history offers backgrounds. Scott, Dumas, Stevenson, Hardy, all the great historical novelists had note-books constantly at hand. (Hardy even scribbled notes on leaves and chips of wood.) Reade devoted a large part of his working day to note-books and cuttings. An idea or the broad outlines of a plot may come at any moment and in any place; even from a dream, as Stevenson and Walpole found—though dreamland is perhaps the most unsatisfactory country from which the novelist can draw his inspiration. Too often there is disillusion on full awakening, as Jebb (not famous as a novelist) found once when suffering from typhoid fever; he dreamed a dream which seemed to make the plan of a most amazing and admirable novel, only to find it resolve itself into sheer nonsense in daylight. Lytton dreamed, or said that he dreamed, verse—but it was nonsense verse. "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," though the best dream-story ever written, suffers from its origin; there is at least

a grain of truth in Watts-Dunton's criticism, that had it not been for the influence upon him of the healthiest of all writers except Chaucer—Sir Walter Scott—Stevenson might have been in the ranks of the pompous problem-mongers of fiction and the stage, who do their best to make life hideous.

He and we were spared that, and Stevenson escaped another peril; he tells us he wrote "Kidnapped" partly for a lark, partly as a pot-boiler, but suddenly it moved, David and Alan stepped out of the canvas, and he found himself in another world. It is a little disconcerting to find that one very great historical novel, Kingsley's "Westward Ho!" (there was an earlier "Westward Ho!" by the way, by James Kirke Paulding, the American novelist, published in 1832) was written partly as a pot-boiler; fine story as it is, it might have been better still if no other influence had been at work than love of his story for his story's sake. As he admitted frankly, he had one eye upon his public; but for all that "Westward Ho!" stands in my opinion high above "Hypatia" (written after prolonged study of Egypt in literature) or "Hereward the Wake" (splendid in parts, but not to be taken too seriously as history). In "Westward Ho!" the prejudice and bigotries of the days he described, and the sturdy patriotism made truculent by the pretensions of Spain, exactly suited Kingsley's own temperament. Early and later days in Clovelly, Bideford, and that countryside, and memories of his grandfather's stirring yarns of adventure and the sea, first inspired him and then gave him zest to write this epic of the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth. The storm was drawn from his own knowledge and experience on the wild North Devon coast. It is interesting, by the way, to compare John Masefield's fine and too little appreciated book "Captain Margaret" with Kingsley's great story.

I first read "Westward Ho!" years back on Bideford Quay, and "Lorna Doone" is another Devon book as good, to me, "as clotted cream, almost"; even if nowadays one is more critical, and some of the verdicts of history are being revised.

Kingsley's book, written as he said for immediate popularity, and to make men (and boys, he might have added) fight, might possibly be a hundred times better, and quite certainly he was right when he said that with more care and time he himself might have made it twice as good. Yet it is a fine book, steeped in the spirit of the strong and stalwart Elizabethan gallants. And here perhaps one may make an aside about the number of great historical novelists who have been essentially poets; Kingsley was one, Blackmore one (some magnificent lines of his, at the time of their rediscovery anonymous, were retrieved for the end of the "Oxford Book of English Verse" by that fine critic Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch), Scott of course first became famous as a poet, Lytton wrote verse, Victor Hugo was more notably poet than novelist, and more recent instances are Stevenson, M. E. Colcridge, Eden Phillpotts, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, and Maurice Hewlett. "The truth is I write everything and approach everything as a poet," said Hewlett—"history, psychology, romance, novels, everything. I use the poetic method entirely—stuff myself with the subject, drench myself, and then let it pour out as it will. I trust to inspiration or what is called inspiration absolutely. I never put anxious or deliberate brainwork into a book; such as there may be of that is done in sleep." If any distinction is to be made between an historical novel and a romance, Blackmore has made it in his one great book, "Lorna Doone"; but even in the structure of its sentences and paragraphs it may be as properly called a poem; the words over and again, without any alteration or addition, shape themselves into blank verse.

There has been considerable discussion as to the foundations of actual fact on which this book stands. I remember hearing years back from a relative of Blackmore's that the novelist explored the Devon countryside to gather material, with his brother-in-law, but it was evidently no very strenuous expedition, as most of the excursions seem to have been made easily, by carriage. Eighteen years before "Lorna Doone"

was published, "Cooper's Guide to Lynton" referred to a certain ruined village of eleven deserted cottages in a North Devon valley; the Doones, once a family of distinction impoverished during the Stuart troubles, were said to have occupied them. The leader or founder of the Doone family at this time had fought as a private soldier at Sedgemoor on Monmouth's side, and had escaped from the brutalities of Jeffreys. They made themselves a terror for miles around, escaping, when pressed, with their booty to Bagworthy, few daring to follow them across the wild fastnesses of Exmoor. The last of the Doones were an old man and his granddaughter who perished in the snow while singing Christmas carols for pence in 1800. In 1863 the legend of the Doones was a current tale among boys in Devon. Three or four years before "Lorna Doone" appeared a tale entitled "The Doones of Exmoor" was published in *The Leisure Hour*, and Blackmore, who saw it, probably was incited by it to write his own greater story.

IV

Environment—the fascination of some district known and loved—has been the first inspiration of many an historical novel. James Payn wrote once, "To the story-teller the germ is everything," and said that it might be put into half a dozen lines. If he had put in half a dozen words the germ of his "Lost Sir Massingberd" he might have written "Man Lost in a Hollow Tree." It was the sight of a hollow tree, and the possibilities it suggested, that led to his most popular book. But there is a curious foot-note to this story. In the Diaries of Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff I came across an account told by Jean Ingelow—the poet, and a finer poet than the modern world has yet quite discovered—of a visit she paid in girlhood to an uncle; he had been guardian to a young Mr. Massingberd, heir to a great estate, who had mysteriously disappeared and was never found. This may

quite probably have made James Payn search for an explanation of the mystery.

George Eliot might have stated the germ of "Romola" in two words: "Florence—Savonarola." She found the City of Flowers more stimulating to the imagination than even Rome—and I think this is not an uncommon experience. Unfortunately a few weeks sojourn is not sufficient, even aided by prodigious reading of Florentine historians, to enable one to catch the spirit of the city, or of the age she describes. Leslie Stephen, so often wrong, was largely right when he described "Romola" as "a magnificent piece of cram." A few famous scenes in fiction which gripped the imagination in youth leave one colder in more mature years. I cannot quite recapture the thrill of the first reading of the assassination of the Marquis, or even the death of Carton, in "A Tale of Two Cities," though I am still convinced that it is a greater book than many modern critics would have us believe. Hypatia's murder is less blood-curdling than of old; and in the same way, the banquet scene in "Romola," which held one breathless in boyhood, has lost much of its fascination. Her characters are indeed, in "Romola," fifteenth-century figures in Victorian dress; her Florence is the Florence of the student-tourist. Merezhkowski in "The Forerunner" paints a Florence at once more vivid and more true. During her brief stay George Eliot made it part of her work to capture the essence of the Florentine character. In a month or two, even perhaps in a year or two, it cannot be captured. Towards the end of a year's stay I myself still made daily and surprising discoveries. The Florentine, who must be today very much in some ways as he was in the Renaissance—and yet in some ways very different—is unlike the Sienese, the Pisans, the Genoese, the Romans, the Neapolitans. He does not wear all his heart on his sleeve, and no doubt found some sly amusement in the English woman-novelist taking her diligent notes in his shops and markets, and poked sly fun at her (as the Florentine loves to do) when she had passed. . . . No; though

Lewes preferred its serial publication because it was a book to be read solemnly and slowly—though the payment for it was so enormous—though in writing it George Eliot passed from youth to age—I would sacrifice "Romola" for a few more chapters of the Aunts in "The Mill on the Floss," or a few more chapters like the opening chapters of "Adam Bede."

VIII.—SOME NOVELISTS AT WORK

"How I hate work!"—Sir Walter Scott, on sitting down at his desk to write.

I

Supposing we look through windows, and even keyholes, to learn something of the methods of the great historical novelists—and of some who are less great. In doing so we shall find ourselves face to face again with the difficult question of the plot and its making.

And we shall find ourselves in odd places; for here, as a beginning, is old Dumas in his bedroom. On this occasion he is writing a play; but the play itself is probably historical, and in any case it might have been one of the novels if we had called on another day.

Hans Andersen, in his charming "Autobiography," tells us that long after mid-day he visited Dumas, and found him still in bed. He had pen and paper in hand, and, too busy to stop, nodded kindly and said, "Sit down a minute; I have just had a visit from my Muse; she will be going directly." He wrote on in silence; suddenly he jumped out of bed with a shout of "Viva!" and cried, "The Third Act is finished!"

Dumas, when he lit upon a story in any character in history, any old book (by the way, a monument to the real D'Artagnan is just being erected in his native place) in any yarn told him by an acquaintance or one of his collaborators, in any period of history or visited country, turned it over in his mind until the novel began to take shape, and then gave his ideas to Maquet, La Croix, or another of his many "devils"—unless he was writing the book entirely himself.

He was handed back by and by a sketch or rough draft on small sheets of paper, and set to work on these, altering, greatly expanding, re-writing at enormous length, on large sheets of paper, until the task was finished. He was not a writer to be shackled overmuch by plot. Like a French loaf, a foot of which can be cut off with convenience, many and perhaps most of his books might be cut into lengths without any serious reason why they should remain intact. He did not write without plot altogether; he was never the slave of plot, and not always, alas! the slave of probability. In one book, "La Dame de Montsoreau," which deals with the France of Henry the Third's reign, he seems more attentive to plot than in others, though it has a sequel in that fine but unequal story, "The Forty-Five."

Sometimes, in the grip of ideas, Dumas was at his desk betimes; we have another picture of him rising at six; before him are laid "thirty-five sheets of paper of the largest size; he writes till eleven, breakfasts in company, and is the life and soul of the company—even in illness, even in poverty or financial anxiety, it was his boast to be always gay—and writes again from twelve to six o'clock dinner. If by any chance he has not filled the allotted number of sheets a momentary shade passes over his face; he steals away and returns two or three hours later, to enjoy the pleasures of the evening."

Alexandre Dumas, Michelet's "force of nature," and Andrew Lang's "eternal boy," was summed up by Stevenson as "the ventripotent mulatto, the great eater, worker, earner, waster, the man of much and witty laughter, the man of the great heart and, alas! the doubtful honesty!" I think perhaps too much has been made of the "doubtful honesty." Flagrant as some of them were, his dishonesties were careless rather than deliberate. He is said to have made £40,000 in one year, yet he came to Paris with two napoleons and left it with two napoleons; a lovable prodigal and scapegrace, who, if he committed literary thefts, yet in his own

Monte Cristo of a pleasure-house was so indifferent to gain that he left piles of gold on tables, from which guests might help themselves. Until I came across a remark by that very able (and original) critic, Mr. Desmond MacCarthy, in one of his reviews, I was under the impression that the story of Maquet and the "ghosts"—Dumas had nine-and-ninety working for him—was well known. Mr. MacCarthy says, rather surprisingly, that his object in drawing attention to a book by Mr. Gustave Simon on Auguste Maquet and Dumas was "not to lessen the fame of Dumas, but to make the English public aware that they owe a considerable amount of the pleasure which such stories as 'Les Trois Mousquetaires,' 'Le Vicomte de Bragelonne,' 'La Collier de la Reine,' 'La Tulipe Noire,' and 'Monte Cristo,' have given them, to a man they have never heard of." But surely a very great deal has been written about this strange collaboration, and the English public who are sufficiently intelligent—and wise—to take Mr. MacCarthy as one of their guides cannot be so ignorant as he supposes. Perhaps I may be allowed to quote what I myself wrote three years before Mr. MacCarthy's article appeared:*

"This 'Traveller from the Arabian Nights' of the *Goncourts' Journal* carried so much in his pack; if some is not his own. Auguste Maquet and his nine-and-ninety fellow-ghosts present a problem still. Dumas has suffered from them more than they ever gave in value; just as Trollope has suffered from a superficial reading of his 'Autobiography.' The best apology for the French novelist is to be found in the internal evidences of his own life and books. D'Artagnan, the young Don Quixote riding into Meung, is, after all, none other than Alexandre Dumas entering the Paris he means to conquer; jeered at as he is for his long country coat and aureole of frizzled hair, yet pugnacious and indomitable. On the humble back of his yellow pony, 'with its head lower than its knees,' and its tail innocent of hair, D'Artagnan swaggers into the court-yard of the 'Jolly Miller,' into the world's letters, and into

* *The Bookman* (London), June, 1926.

the world's hearts. His mother's parting gift was a certain balsam with the magical property of curing wounds not mortal; thanks to it, and the absence of any doctor, his own early wounds are healed. This Bohemian balsam contained oil, wine, rosemary, and ' other ingredients, the list of which has not come down to us.' These secret ingredients Dumas, and only Dumas, knew where to find and how to blend with the oil, wine and rosemary of his collaborators. Are we to cavil at the leading counsel who wins his case? At the statesman who has not himself set down every ' little dot ' in the budget? At Napoleon, even because he wins Austerlitz with help?"

I do not suggest that Dumas did not exceed the limit of legitimate assistance many times, or that he was not an unblushing plagiarist on occasion; he was, in a brazen fashion which at least can claim honesty in its openness and lack of shame; there was nothing stealthy as there seems to have been in the case of Shorthouse, who succeeded in taking in the public for so long. Dumas bought Maquet's story "Le Bonhomme Buvet," meaning to turn it into a play; gave 1,200 francs for it; and turned it into a four-volume book which appeared under his own name as "Le Chevalier d'Harmental." No doubt Maquet did a great deal that passes under the greater name. And yet I think it is impossible to study the life of Dumas and the genius of Dumas closely without seeing that he was the light in the lantern which Maquet and others helped to make. Take, for instance, La Croix, known also and perhaps better as the Bibliophile Jacob, though his admirable works on French history are familiar to the historian and the historical novelist (they are immensely useful where French history is concerned) under the name of La Croix. He was a mine of information on whom Dumas undoubtedly drew largely. But as an historical novelist! In Paris, a few years back, I had the curiosity to read carefully, in the National Library, a novel by La Croix, "Les Deux Fous." He has an admirable story to tell, drawn partly from legend,

partly from history. But how different in the telling from the story Dumas would have made! Both Maquet and La Croix were undoubtedly gifted men, and Maquet may have deserved more credit for his share than he received. But I still feel that Dumas should not be dethroned and Maquet, or any of his "ghosts," set in his place.

The purchase of "Le Bonhomme Buvet" reminds one that another historical novelist, Charles Lever, purchased the material for some of his most famous books. He made an arrangement with an English officer who had served in the Napoleonic wars to sell him his adventures. Two napoleons were paid by Lever for the right to use them, and a legal contract was properly drawn up. The officer appears in Lever's work under the name of "Major Monsoon." But here again, knowing what we know of Lever, we may be sure that the life of the stories is his.

From Lockhart first, but also from innumerable other sources, we catch glimpses of Scott at work, though so much of his writing was done in secret and in a constant anxiety that the authorship should not be brought home to him. For years the current of his ordinary work went on, and how he contrived to write so much, and so notably, is still one of the marvels of literature. In the age of Scott, James, Dickens, Dumas, Hugo, there were giants in the land though the typewriter was unknown, and the mere physical labour of setting down so many hundreds of thousands or millions of words with the pen was stupendous. There is a famous pen-picture of the untiring hand seen at the window at night, when the world was quiet; but in the earlier years his writing was done early, before his visible work of the day was done. Part of his secret was a mind well stored in youth, so that he could draw on an inexhaustible stock of legend, history, details of bygone life. He tells us this in his "Journal" of October 17th, 1826, when he recorded having read "Sir John Chiverton" and "Brambletye

House"—"novels," he says, "in what I may surely claim as the style

> "Which I was born to introduce—
> Refined it first, and show'd its use."

The first was by Ainsworth, as has been mentioned already, an imitation of the days of chivalry; the second, by Horace Smith, one of the authors of "Rejected Addresses," was a tale of the Civil Wars, introducing among other historical characters Charles II. and Nell Gwynne. Both were described by Scott as clever books, and he read them with great interest during a journey from Scotland to England. But he adds, "I am like Captain Bobadil who trained a hundred gentlemen to fight very nearly, if not altogether, as well as myself . . . but I, like Sir Andrew Aguecheek, do it 'more natural.' They have to read old books and consult antiquarian collections; I have long read them and, thanks to a strong memory, possess the information they have to seek for." As this leads to a dragging in by the shoulders of historical details, "the interest" (he says) "becomes lost in a minute description of events not affecting the progress of the tale." He admitted having erred sometimes himself in this way, in order to bring in fine things not essential to the story. One must not let the background eclipse the principal figures, the frame overpower the picture. On the other hand, he notes in the "Journal" that a Mr. Bell had sent him an historical novel, "but he goes not the way to write it; he is too general, and not sufficiently minute."

Scott, as I have already said, could never address himself to a written or careful plot. There are many interesting references in his "Journal" and "Letters" to the progress of his books. In his criticism of "St. Ronan's Well" he said that though the language was rather good, the story was terribly contorted and unnatural, and the catastrophe melancholy, "which should always be avoided." . . .

But this raises the question how many great works we should lose if a happy ending were insisted on; the ending of the Œdipus Rex, for instance, can hardly be described as cheerful.

His mind was always on the alert, everywhere, anywhere, for ideas. The idea of "The Abbot," for instance, came to him during a visit to Blair-Adam in a hot summer in 1819, when he and his host and friends lolled on the grass together, or sat on felled trees and talked. It was during the same visit that the sight of some porpoises gave him a scene in "The Antiquary," one of his own favourite books. Constable's suggestion that a novel on Elizabeth should follow his picture of Mary in "The Abbot" resulted in the writing of "Kenilworth," but Scott refused to make the Armada the central interest as he was urged to do. He took the idea of a brave coward, or a cowardly brave man, in "The Fair Maid of Perth," from Miss Baillie's "Etheling."

Scott lay in bed an hour or two before getting up, with the ideas for his novel simmering in his mind. While dressing he planned his chapter for the day. He wrote at tremendous speed, and seems never to have been distracted by interruptions, but could always find time to turn aside to issue an order, give a glance at Donald his piper, or pay attention to Camp, Maida, Pepper, Spice, and his other dogs if they clamoured to come in or go out. If a word would not come at call he did not trouble to search for one (as Stevenson did, whose "Kidnapped" has been described by one critic as the greatest Scott novel since Scott), but would leave a blank to be filled in later. The last two volumes of "Waverley" were written in three weeks. Flaubert, whose visit to Carthage inspired that lurid but nevertheless justly famous book "Salammbô" (my own memories of a visit to Carthage years ago, and of miserable inhabitants dwelling in wretchedness among scanty and scattered ruins in arid fields against a background of blue, empty sea, makes me appreciate the immense

power of his reconstructive imagination) held, unlike Scott, that there was only one exactly appropriate word or set of words "*if one could find it.*"

Charles Dickens, who made history the background of only two of his novels, has left evidences of his careful planning of his later books, but his plots sometimes leave much to be desired. That he *could* construct a careful and ingenious plot is shown in his unfinished book "Edwin Drood," which has set so many brains to work at possible solutions of the mystery. I am heretic enough to think that too much attention has been paid to this fragment. "A Tale of Two Cities" has quite a good plot; in places awkwardly engineered. The charge has been brought against Lytton that his characters were plot-ridden; for instance, in "Night and Morning," where they are driven hither and thither and brought in contact mechanically. To some extent this may be said of "A Tale of Two Cities." Coincidence is used too freely. Just as Scott made his mind a bank for the deposit of scraps of past history, so Dickens stored in his innumerable details, episodes, names, of his own present day. His alert eyes missed nothing. A basket-work chaise and a fat pony passed during a walk with a friend is duly noted and reappears in a book; a clock seen over a Mr. Humphry's shop during an early visit to Barnard's Castle forms the title and subject of a tale. Lytton's habit was to linger over the plan and subject of some contemplated work before writing a line, perhaps delaying the actual setting of pen to paper for years. He debated with himself whether to write "Harold" with due regard to historic accuracy, or to fling actual fact (as far as it could be ascertained) overboard, and "make history into flagrant romance." But his own conception of an historical novel, though it sometimes led him into dreariness and often into grandiloquence and stilted phrases, was to extract natural romance from actual history and, where fact and imagination were at differences, to let romance go

overboard before its graver opponent. He was faithful to the outstanding facts, and played as few tricks as possible with chronology.

Charles Reade's methods are interesting. Some, in his early life, seem to have gone beyond the limits of common sense, though one may possibly see in Scott's work and in Lytton's the influence of a feudal or Gothic environment—in the first instance elaborately artificial, in the second through inheritance. Both Scott and Lytton had, in Taine's phrase, "the feudal mind." Sir David Hunter Blair has stated that as an Oxford undergraduate he occasionally drank tea with Reade, then a Fellow of Magdalen, in his lofty rooms in the New Buildings. He was writing his novel of the South Seas, "Foul Play," and in order to simulate the hue of tropic seas and skies had had his walls and ceilings painted blue. No record has come down to us of manacles when writing "It is Never Too Late to Mend," or of Bedlam straw when engaged on "Hard Cash," a novel which might very usefully have its counterpart today when there is still the same opposition to the complete investigation and reform of our asylum-system. No doubt "The Cloister and the Hearth" was written without similar adventitious aids. It took shape first as a serial in *Once a Week*, in 1859, under the title of "A Good Fight." But after writing it, he tells us, he took wider views of the subject, and also felt uneasy at having deviated *unnecessarily* from the historical outline of a true story. As a result he gave more than a year and a half's labour to making it as exact a picture as possible of the age he described. (It is interesting to remember that one of the early school of picturesque historians, Froissart, is said to have devoted fifty years to touching and retouching his chronicles.) Reade provided himself with three sheets of cardboard, on one of which he set down the plot, on another the characters, and on the third the more important facts to be borne in mind; having done this, he set to work on the actual writing,

on foolscap, referring frequently to his enormous scrap-books of cuttings and written notes.

II

Oliver Goldsmith spoke once of plots which were no more than a young lady pricking her finger with a needle. Few historical novels of any note treat a definite plan so cavalierly. Scott could never, as he has told us, be bound down by plot, but he certainly mapped out plots which were invariably departed from before the story had proceeded far; I think this must be the general experience. Lytton, though he admitted that the skilful mechanism of plot was of considerable value, said that it was much less requisite in the novel than in drama, and that many of the greatest prose fictions were independent of plot altogether. As one book where plot plays a very trifling part he instanced "Don Quixote," and placed "Gil Blas" in the same category. But a strictly historical novel, unlike the picaresque, is to a large extent governed by its background. Some kind of plot is there, ready to hand. We value "Esmond" a little more because so much careful work has gone to its construction. It is the only one in which Thackeray was not hustled into activity, and one which Trollope said (to Thackeray himself) was not only the author's best, but a book to which there was no second. We value some of Scott's novels less because they suffer from looseness of plan. It was when writing of "Esmond" that Trollope said how much harder it was to think of a story than to write it. "The author can sit down with a pen in his hand and write for a given time, and produce a certain number of words. That is comparatively easy. . . . But to think it all over as you lie in bed, or walk about, or sit cosily over your fire, to turn it all in your thoughts and make the things fit—that requires elbow-grease of the mind."

Stevenson at all events spared no elbow-grease of the

mind in his work. Few authors have told us more of their labours, their difficulties, their depressions and elations, their methods and aims. We know how "Kidnapped" arose from a paper on the Glencoe Murder; how "The Master of Ballantrae" took its title from the Ballantrae where he spent a night during a walking tour in 1876; the name stayed in his mind. And we know how, when living close to the Canadian border, he walked, one bitter night, on the verandah of his house just outside Saranac; it was very dark; he could hear from the river below the sounds of the ice-packs—but he may continue for a moment in his own words:

"Come," said I to my engine, "let us make a tale, a story of many years and countries, of the sea and the land, savagery and civilization; a story that shall have the same savage features, and may be treated in the same summary elliptic method as the book you have been reading and admiring."

(This book which Stevenson had "just been reading and admiring" was "The Phantom Ship," by Captain Marryat.)

"There cropped up in my memory a singular case of a buried and resuscitated fakir, which I had often been told by an uncle of mine, then lately dead, Inspector-General Balfour."

"The Master of Ballantrae" was, he said, the hardest job he ever had to do; he was in constant difficulties with it. One knows how the India of his uncle's story became the dreary wastes in which his idea first came to him. "Kidnapped," on the other hand, which is on the whole a much finer book, though there are passages in "The Master" —for instance, the duel and the candles burning in the night —both unforgettable and inimitable, was the only book of his which largely told itself; at all events the only later book; here the characters took the bit between their teeth and ran away with him and his story. Stevenson once told

Crockett that he wrote that magnificent short story, " The Sire de Malétroit's Door " (told first over a winter fire in Paris, but written out as " The Sire de Malétroit's Mousetrap " in Penzance) ten times before he was satisfied. But that not very satisfactory book, " The Black Arrow," which he liked least of his novels, though he had some affection for his picture of Richard of Gloucester, was written in haste; six chapters were finished in as many days. He had prepared himself eight years before by careful reading of the " Paston Letters " and other books, but the actual writing was so haphazard and unplanned that, when he found himself separated by his wanderings from the numbers of *Young Folks* in which the first instalments had appeared, he was at a loss to know what his characters had already done, or what he was to make them do next. This lapse of memory brings back an immortal sentence in Stevenson's schoolboy-magazine story, " Creek Island, or Adventures in the South Seas "—a prophetic title if ever there was one ! —when, realizing the importance of a love interest, he wrote, " I forgot to tell you that I had made love to beautiful girl " (*sic*).

He described " The Black Arrow," his attempt at an English historical novel, as " Tushery, by the Mass !" and so very much of it is. In his later work there was no turning out copy at the rate of a chapter a day for the man who wrote, " If there is anywhere a thing said in two sentences that could have been as clearly and as engagingly and as forcibly said in one, then it's amateur work." In Samoa we find him at work at six, going on diligently until ten-thirty, when it was time to give a history lesson to his stepson; at eleven came luncheon and music till two o'clock, then work again until four-thirty, when it was time to have a bath before dinner at five; after dinner he played cards until eight, when he went to bed and read himself to sleep. He read a good many historical novels; his " dear old G. P. R. James " was one favourite, who could write " a good,

dull interesting honest book with a genuine old-fashioned talent in the invention when not strained, and had a genuine old-fashioned feeling for the English language." James—"George Prince Regent James," as the wags called him after a somewhat grandiloquent speech—was himself a very rapid worker, and would sometimes write twenty-four pages in a spell of four or five hours. The pen moved so fast that it kept pace with the ideas and gave them no chance of escape from committal to paper. He justified this by saying that he found more spirit and interest in his work when thus written, and so it was best left uncorrected and untouched. Another historical novelist whom Stevenson could rely on for a day's pleasant reading was Marion Crawford, an author whom Tennyson included with Scott, Besant, Hardy, Blackmore, Conan Doyle, Hall Caine, Shorthouse, and Stevenson himself among his favourites. It is fair to say that Stevenson, for all his praises, was under no illusions about James; he found "The Cavalier" worse than he feared, "and yet somehow engaging"; while as for Marion Crawford, he admitted that though his work had life and "moved," "*ce n'est pas toujours la guerre.*" A present-day novelist of distinction, Mr. W. J. Locke, has said that he sometimes builds up a book from a character, and sometimes from the germ of a plot; Stevenson wrote of his unhappily unfinished "Weir of Hermistoun" that the plot was not good—but this was early in his task—and yet "Lord-Justice-Clerk Hermistoun ought to be a plum." The Lord-Justice-Clerk's son's motion for the abolition of capital punishment was evidently based upon Stevenson's own speech against it at a debate in 1870—when he found no seconder. He would have no difficulty in finding seconders today.

Henry Sidgwick, in a conversation with Mrs. J. H. Shorthouse about her husband's work, was told that Shorthouse steeped himself in seventeenth-century literature until he felt fully equipped for a novel of that period—if he only

had a plot! Not long after the plot was found. Sidgwick remarks, "I thought it rude to ask her what the plot was."

It may be interesting to glance for a moment at the methods of a famous French novelist in writing a book which, though not strictly, perhaps, an historical novel, because the author was a young man when the events he described took place, is nevertheless in a sense historical fiction. Zola was exempt as an only son with others dependant on him from active participation in the Franco-German War of 1870, but his "La Débâcle" is one of the most famous works inspired by that tragic episode in history for which time has brought a compensation far more tragic in its cost. The present popularity of war-novels may at least justify a reference to the way in which one great war-novel was planned. He divided his book when he was planning it into three parts, each part containing eight chapters. The first part dealt with the early defeats of the French on the Rhine, and the retreat towards Sédan; the second, of two hundred pages, dealt with the battle of Sédan itself; the third, with the Commune; the whole book to close with "a blood-red sky." But he found his preliminary plan inadequate; the work prolonged itself; "when I attack a subject like this," he said, "I want to push the whole world into it." His attitude towards that war would have been emphasized had he lived to see the reversal of fortune; "so many imbeciles," he exclaimed once, "killing each other off!" The book is a Panorama, in which the chief character is not an individual, but the French Army itself personified. After careful documentation he wrote out a summary of each chapter in a few words, and then made a more detailed plan in seven or eight hundred words.

III

Here, then, we have a few glimpses at the historical novelist or pseudo-historical novelist and his methods. The hundred and one questions that arise may be answered in a parody. There are nine-and-sixty ways of constructing historical novels, and every single one of them is right. We may paint our walls and ceilings blue like Reade, surround ourselves with the pseudo-Gothic like Scott, live (if we can) in real baronial halls like Lytton. Or we may prefer, like Trollope, who took a great interest in the historical novel and did actually write one of some promise, to take a calm walk preferably among woodlands, think out a book, and write so many words a day until it is finished. We may stand at a slab of black wood like Hugo and toss sheet after sheet of finished manuscript to the ground. We may revise and revise and revise, like Stevenson; or set our pens tearing across paper like Scott and his consciously inferior imitator, James. We may, like Hewlett, do no hard and deliberate planning or brain-work, except subconsciously; we may spend hours over our cardboard charts like Reade.

I think myself, from my own experience, that some attempt at a written plot is almost essential. But the plan should be elastic, and if necessary—as it generally will be necessary—a new arrangement of plot should be made as the story advances. Without any prearranged plot the story is likely to be loose and ill-knit and chaotic. With too rigid a plot, or two scrupulous an attention to the plan that has been set before one for guidance, there is the danger of being plot-mastered and plot-ridden. As the plot develops from the germ, so the novel, if it is a living thing, must develop from the plot. You cannot keep a tree in a flower-pot to its maturity.

As an aid to clarity I think it is very useful to have some sympathetic ear to which the rough outline of a contemplated

story can be told. In the verbal telling a tale shapes itself; unsuspected difficulties are discovered and have to be met; new ideas may come by which the story is improved; the dull and irrelevant can be detected and pruned away.

But it is impossible to lay down hard-and-fast rules. In O. Henry's short story, "The Roads We Take," he makes Bob Tidball say cheerfully, "Oh, I reckon you'd have ended up about the same. It ain't the road we take; it's what's inside of us that makes us turn out the way we do." And there's a good deal of truth in that saying.

IX.—THE CHOICE OF PERIOD

" At night when all assembling round the fire
Closer and closer drawn till they retire,
A tale is told of India or Japan,
Of Merchants from Golcond or Astrakan,
What time wild nature revelled unrestrain'd,
And Sinbad voyaged, and the Caliphs reigned."

SAMUEL ROGERS.

I

THERE is a passage in Longfellow's Prose Works, where he says that the history of the past is a mere puppet-show; a little man comes out and blows a little trumpet, and goes in again. You look for something new, and lo! another little man comes out, and blows another little trumpet, and goes in again. And it is all over.

If this were all history; if there were no original of Miles Standish, or John Alden to take Priscilla's blushing answer (from these two Longfellow was descended), if no counterparts existed of Hiawatha or there had been no Finnish epic from which he might have drawn inspiration for his poem, if there were no bells ringing from Bruges belfry through the centuries, no Acadia or real Evangeline to search all those weary years for her lover, no Golden Legend, no Judas Maccabæus, no Dante's "Purgatorio" and "Inferno" and "Paradiso" for him to have rendered into English, the historical novelist would indeed be hard put to it to ring changes on little men blowing their little trumpets in a puppet-show. Henry James said that it is impossible to imagine what a novelist takes himself to be unless he regard himself as an historian and his narrative as a history, and that it is only as an historian that he has the smallest *locus standi*. We are compelled to limit the range of the historic novel proper

and disregard the novel which is history of ten minutes or a year ago; but even if we take not fifty or sixty years since, but a century or more, how much is left us! I begin this chapter with a quotation from Rogers on human life. If you will turn to this poem, or to some of Whitman's with their inventories of men's activities and interests—if you glance at the indices to Baker's Guide or Nield's Guide to historical fiction—Longfellow's solitary trumpeter loses himself in an immense pageant of the past. Look at the visions Rogers conjures up in a few lines in hinting at the tales that may be told around that winter's fire.

> "Of Knights renowned from holy Palestine,
> And minstrels, such as swept the lyre divine,
> When Blondel came, and Richard in his Cell
> Heard, as he lay, the song he knew so well. . . ."

Or again:

> "And now to Venice—to a bridge, a square,
> Glittering with lights—all nations making there
> With light reflected in the tremulous tide
> Where gondolas in gay confusion glide,
> Answering the jest, the song on every side,"

A now-forgotten Victorian novelist, Alice King, once wrote of the many types of novels in a summary which suggests entirely different methods, and different backgrounds and periods. A Greek tragedy, she thought, was the finest model for the construction of a plot; and referred to "the pompous historical novel of Italy, the Spanish romance with its improbability and its prettiness, the story of Germany with its embroidery of vague fancies, the playful novelette of France." Here are five countries only, and volumes could be written on the historical fiction emanating from, or concerned with, each one. I never enter a great library, like the British Museum, or the National Libraries of Paris, Berlin, or any other great capital or city, without a momentary depression. Surely everything has already been written that needs to be written, and if history is being made every

day and every moment, it is but a repetition of what has happened a thousand times and thousands of times been recorded. The historical novel itself was no new thing when Scott wrote; in 53 B.C. a Roman soldier was reproved for taking from his knapsack and reading a scandalous fiction about history. When that able critic Thomas Seccombe wrote on "Waverley" in its centenary year, in the *Contemporary Review* for July, 1914—only a month before the most stupendous tragedy in modern or indeed all history—he said that the year which had seen Napoleon's Empire begin its fall saw the birth of the modern historical novel. Certainly for long years Scott stood not first only, but unique. Trollope has said that his generation had once regarded novels as ephemeral (in the fifties of last century), and only those by Scott and a few others which, from "Robinson Crusoe" downwards, had made permanent names were regarded as exceptions to this rule. In those days, to quote Pollok in "The Course of Time,"

> "A novel was a book
> Thrice-volumed, and once read, and oft cramm'd full
> Of poisonous error, blackening every page;
> And oftener still of trifling second-hand
> Remark, and old discovered putrid thought
> And miserable incident at war with nature; with itself and truth at war."

Or so the novel was regarded, and some of us can remember how this attitude towards the novel persisted in a much later age. Today we have far more than "Scott and a few others" to consider; and we make best-sellers of "Jew Süss" and "The Ugly Duchess" at which Pollok and his contemporaries would have been abashed into speechlessness. At first sight there seem, in the world of historical fiction, no more countries or ages left to conquer. In "Queen of the Dawn" Rider Haggard takes us back to the eighteenth century before Christ; Merezhkowski, in "The Birth of the Gods" and "Akhnaton," to the fourteenth

century B.C., which George Ebers and Anthony Armstrong have also made backgrounds for their novels. But we may go farther back still. Rider Haggard, "Ashton Hilliers," the Scandinavian writer Johannes Jensen, and others have gone to the Ice Age and the Stone Age; perhaps the nearest approach made by H. G. Wells to historical fiction is his "A Story of the Stone Age." The far distant past has a curious fascination for some minds; I have been struck again and again by the tendency in American historical or pseudo-historical fiction, when it is not concerned (I think more profitably concerned) with the story of the New World, to explore the remotest regions of time. Gertrude Atherton's latest novel has Dido for heroine. Lying by me at the moment is a letter from a young writer, unknown to me personally, who says that he notes with satisfaction that I have advised, in an article on the Craft of Historical Fiction, the exploitation of hitherto neglected periods of history—but let me quote his own words in continuation:

"for I have always held that novels depicting the life of, say, such ancient nations as Egypt, Greece, and especially Crete—which, owing to the recent discoveries there, has assumed such an importance in the history of mankind—are of the greatest value as getting at the very roots of civilization. In this connection, therefore, I should very much like to have your opinion on the possibilities of the ancient world—which, it seems to me, should provide themes splendidly adaptable to artistic treatment—as indeed is proved by the fine quality of certain of the few novels dealing with those early eras; as, for instance, Flaubert's 'Salammbô,' George Moore's 'Brook Kerith,' Louis Couperus's 'The Tour.'* You will agree, I think, that the objection that ancient history is so remote is invalid, for is it not the business of a historical novelist to 'bring it home' to the people of the present?"

Now there seem to me two advantages—one a dubious advantage—about the choice of periods before recorded

* The story of a young Roman's tour in Egypt in A.D. 20.

history can pretend to a certain standard of accuracy, or even exist at all. There are more space and more opportunity. You have not centuries only, but thousands and possibly hundreds of thousands of years to choose from; to science, always elastic in its dealings with the age of man and the world, a thousand years are but as a day. Nothing can be more inexact in certain provinces of sciences than its speculations. The historical novelist who goes back to the actual cave-man for his hero is almost as free from competition as a Polar explorer. He is not crowded as a man exploring London or New York, Paris or Berlin or Rome, is crowded, and he is not likely to be challenged about his facts where the few scanty facts on which he works are by no means established. Someone has said that it is the easiest thing in the world to write a notable book about a land which no one has visited but yourself. If you like you may out-Rougemont de Rougemont, out-Münchausen Münchausen himself. But at any moment new discoveries may put your story on the rubbish-heap. This applies in a measure, of course, to any age in the world's history; your Queen Victoria, General Gordon, Florence Nightingale, of the Victorian age, may suddenly turn to a new being in the hands of some Lytton Strachey; a period slightly earlier, when eminent Judges said with tears in their eyes (like Lord Ellenborough) that the constitution would fall and society be dissolved if men, women, and even children were not hanged for petty theft, may suddenly lose its virtue and be found ignorant and cruel. This applies still more forcibly as the age recedes. A book I reviewed some little time back threw contempt on the accuracy of Julius Cæsar, and stated, on the authority of the Triads, that the Druidic worship was extraordinarily pure and essentially peaceabl and mild; the stories told to children of human sacrifice in wicker cages were all hearsay and nonsense. While reading at the British Museum I broke off once for an hour to accompany one of the admirable tours through the galleries; we

were led through rooms where relics of the ancient Briton were displayed, and were told by the guide that our forefathers were very different from the painted savages we had been led to believe them; even the patterns on their armour were shown to be of Greek design. In the midst of his lecture the guide paused to tell us of an elderly schoolmaster who, aghast, interrupted him once to say, "But—but—this is not what I have been teaching my children all these years." "No, my dear sir, it is not, for the simple reason that what you have been teaching your scholars all these years has been proved wrong."

A few bones, a few scraps of metal—and your story falls to pieces. All London flocked not long ago to see the treasures recovered at Ur, and to find melancholy interest in the fate of the Queen, the murdered waiting-women, the guards, the oxen. The royal tombs have only yielded up grudgingly after long, long centuries the secrets of Egypt. China, even while I write, seems upsetting all theories as to the antiquity of man.

You may invent names, invent environment, even make your clock strike in Roman halls and years (as Shakespeare did) with impunity and with ease—until you are found out.

It is comparatively easy to write about the very remote past, to invent names, perhaps, which probably were never on land or sea. But you do it at your risk.

I want to set side by side for a moment two books dealing with the world very long ago (but not before a certain amount of knowledge was at the command of the writers) which show how well, and, in my opinion, how badly, a professedly historical novel may be written.

It would not, perhaps, be fair to give the title and name of the author of the first book which I am using as an illustration. It had certain considerable merits. Here and there were good descriptive passages, a very great amount of study had evidently gone to its construction, and the fact that it attempted to show modern politics in a kind of

mirage of the past gave it a measure of excuse ; in a publisher's note the claim was made that the book was " more than an historical novel." It was a story of one of the ancient Kings of Egypt, told with the aid of the somewhat mechanical device of a contemporary papyrus. The book, I may say, was American in origin.

Here are a few extracts :

" The priests saw to that, Bek," he said. " Wages had a way of going up or down just enough to keep one above the starvation level. Anubis damn their educated souls ! Still, when things got very bad we staged a riot. We could nearly always count on the assistance of the boys in the Cemetery Lots. A rough crowd, and may Osiris be good to them !"

" Amon-Ra has more things to attend to than jotting down the verbatim remarks of a retired army sergeant."

" This new dam of Pharaoh's . . . means that something is going to bust loose in Egypt."

" Sure," said Mahu, later on in the day, " how in the name of Anubis was you to know different ?"

" Holy Menth," said Mahu, " the kid wants to know are there many more people in Thebes than in Aswan? . . . I bet you there'll be a bigger mob watching the boat come in tomorrow than you would collect in Aswan on Inundation Day."

" Slick ? Holy Menth, how slick that Temple gang was !"

" The Horus daughter is as keen as mustard on intelligence and that sort of thing."

" I must really cut down, or I shall be a rheumatic tub by the time you are Grand Vizier."

" Ain't I that already ?" I said, with what I considered a very clever blending of jollity and suggestion. . . .

" You little Nubian cock-of-the-walk," he said. " You milk-lipped, downy, blushing, kindergarten graduate from Aswan."

" Your shrewd Pharaoh gets away with it."

" Would we kindly give Hoteb our candid opinion whether in the history of Egypt such putrid, malodorous craftsmanship had ever been attempted ?"

" Brother," howled Ohad, " don't tell me *you* have fallen for that truck."

These detached quotations are scarcely fair to the author, because in the book I refer to there is a great deal of real knowledge of the Egypt of that day; but for me all illusion is stripped off; I am in the land of films and film-captions, of a Hollywood world where knights in armour look at wrist-watches, and where (as I have myself seen) men-at-arms wear jerkins or breastplates and twentieth-century trousers. Take now, as a contrast, a writer who really can reconstruct a long-distant past, and make it convincing and real. The distance of the periods with which she has chosen to deal has even led some reviewers to question whether Mrs. Naomi Mitchison is a serious historical novelist at all, though one reviewer has called her "the best, if not the only English historical novelist now writing." If I can scarcely agree with *The New Statesman* that Mrs. Mitchison may be the *only* English historical novelist now writing,* I can, on the whole, agree with Dr. Ernest Barker that an historical novel may sometimes be true in art and even in history without exactitude of historical detail, and that Mrs. Mitchison's very fine book, "The Conquered," is entitled to be considered a serious historical novel. Certain inaccuracies and, it seems to me, almost wilful stripping away of illusion are trifles which do not spoil an amazing picture of Gaul during Cæsar's Wars, and especially of a Vercingetorix who lives and moves and is real. Take as another example of Mrs. Mitchison's power of reconstructing the

* The historical novelist is constantly receiving small electric shocks from certain expert critics of his craft. I have just glanced through an article in a widely circulated literary periodical on "The Year's Fiction." Under the sub-heading "Historical Novels" the first book mentioned, as one which seems helping to open out a new phase of the historical novel, is Mr. Freeman's "Joseph and His Brethren," described as a Bible history reconstruction. But this is a very admirable novel of farm-life in Suffolk, and has no connection beyond its title with the Biblical narrative, neither is it an historical novel in any sense that I have been able to discover. Another writer on books stated recently that most people were unaware that Dumas introduced history into his novels!

past her story "The Hostages" in "When the Bough Breaks." Her characters belong to the past, but they are part of our present also without any violation of our sense of the chasm between long-ago and now. See how admirably in this story atmosphere is conveyed, by a touch here and there. The Roman General comes in to the three boys who are hostages. "A little wind came in too, and I heard the horse-hairs rustling against the bronze"; the hairs of the black horse-tail cresting his golden helmet. (I have an uneasy feeling that the author of the previous book would have been unable to resist the temptation to make one of his boys say, "Where did you get that —— helmet?") When the boys are set down, bound, in the bottom of a wagon out of the sun to go to Rome, they see the tops of the trees they passed under along the road, "but not much else." Exactly what they would have seen and "not much else," but not every writer would have remembered that. The Roman Triumph becomes vivid as in the dust "the Roman soldiers went by first, crowned and singing; after them our prisoners, chained together; and more Romans; and trophies of swords and spears, and the pick of the cattle that had been taken; and more Romans; and a great line of women and children, and pictures of the battles, and ox-carts full of gold and silver, well guarded; and more Romans still, and more prisoners; and we were bitterly angry and sad." At the end of this book, "When the Bough Breaks," there is a note by the author on her methods which all who essay this form of historical fiction will do well to read. "One probably starts," she says, in this "Note on Books and One's Funny Idea of Ancient History," "with a few fixed ideas about the Romans. Earliest, I suppose, the sudden dawn of a city on seven hills—large hills, of course." Then come the Lays of Ancient Rome, learnt as soon as one goes to school; afterwards a few hazy centuries, a little clearer knowledge—and by and by Shakespeare making all look quite different. "I don't expect the Gallic Wars produce any effect on any-

body; one didn't get beyond the bridge over the Rhine." And then Nero, and the films, and by and by "there's Marius the Epicurean in a green calf binding on the drawing-room table." Gibbon "leaps in like Puck"—how amazed Gibbon would be were he alive!—and "Hypatia," but none of the nice people were really Roman Romans. Horrors, slaves—the Northerners "really thrilling"—but read this amusing note, and yet instructive note, in the epilogue to the author's own book.

Walter Pater has been decried lately by Mr. Arnold Bennett; Mrs. Mitchison's reference to "Marius the Epicurean" reminds me that I should not ignore here a novel which made so much stir forty years or so ago. It deals with the days of Marcus Aurelius, to whom Marius was secretary. Marius begins with orthodoxy—the orthodoxy of his boyhood—but, speculating about life, becomes an intellectual Epicurean; he finds Stoicism fail him; then becomes a kind of Theist, next turns to Christian æstheticism, and as death approaches draws nearer to a real faith in some unseen Power. There is no love story and hardly any feminine interest; indeed, the chief interest of Pater's work does not lie in narrative or in plot, but in a kind of cold, marmoreal reproduction of the past as background for the play of ideas and spiritual struggles. His delightfully told story of Psyche and Cupid is not necessary to the book, but I find that it has stamped itself most vividly on my own mind, when I recall the impression made on me a good many years back. He was careful and elaborate in his methods, making short notes of ideas as they occurred to him, and jotting down on slips of loose paper innumerable notes afterwards carefully sorted out—an early instance of card-indexing, and one very interesting, I think, to the historical novelist. When all his loose sheets had been arranged in the order he needed, he began to write on ruled paper, leaving the alternate lines blank; copied all out again, when the vacant lines had been filled with new ideas and corrections;

sometimes he even had his work printed to see how it looked in type before the final copy went to the press. In "Marius the Epicurean" there is one memorable picture of the Roman villa, "White Nights," with its outlook over the blue sea, and the lighthouse flashing its light across the waters, and the sea-winds blowing the scent of hay through the house, and the snowy marble of the Carrara mountains visible against the Mediterranean. That snowy range against the blue or violet of waters is a sight not easily forgotten; in literature Walter Pater, doing his meticulously careful work, conveyed somehow, I always think, the effect of the Carrara marble into his words and scenes. I ought not to be surprised that Pater, with his chill and classic beauty, is among those butchered to make a Bennett article, nor should I be surprised, if Pater were living today, to find him just a little unappreciative of some of Mr. Arnold Bennett. . . . But I want to say a word or two about Mr. Arnold Bennett and the historical novel later on.

Another modern critic, Mr. Bernard Shaw, who is anxious to dispel our illusions about Shakespeare, has made some severe comments on an historical novel for which I have already spoken a word of praise: Mark Twain's "Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, by the Sieur Louis de Conte." This novel covers the ground which Mr. Shaw himself has covered in his play—also, of course, historical fiction—"St. Joan." He is very severe on Mark Twain's Joan, "skirted to the ground, and with as many petticoats as Noah's wife in a toy ark," "an attempt to combine Bayard with Esther Summerson from 'Bleak House' into an unimpeachable American school-teacher in armour." He adds that, like Esther, she makes the creator ridiculous, and yet, as she is the work of a man of genius, remains a credible human goody-goody in spite of her author's infatuation. Here, it seems to me, we have unsound criticism of both Clemens and Dickens. Mr. Shaw's own St. Joan avoids some of the crudities of Mark Twain's, and is certainly

a notable creation or rendering—but his claim to have given the real Middle Ages does not seem to me to rest on very sound foundations. We have a great blare of trumpets telling us that at last a writer has given us the genuine atmosphere—on the whole, it is no doubt genuine atmosphere, as far as it goes; but here and there the atmosphere of a later century intrudes itself, one can find indications of superficial knowledge, and certainly some of Mark Twain's faults we can find also in Mr. Bernard Shaw's play. At all events I am certain that without any blowing of trumpets or drastic criticisms of other good work, many an historical novelist dead or living has reproduced the mediæval atmosphere quite as successfully. Mr. Shaw refers to Mark Twain as "the Innocent Abroad who sees the lovely churches of the Middle Ages without a throb of emotion, author of 'A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur' in which the heroes and heroines of mediæval chivalry are guys seen through the eyes of a street Arab." Some of Mark Twain I cannot myself read without irritation, but I am certain that he did have a throb of emotion now and then in the mediæval churches. He was not writing a book to record this; he was writing a book meant chiefly to amuse by its startling incongruity and its disconcerting surprises. It is a sound rule that the critic should judge an author by his success in doing what he intended to do, not what the critic thinks he should have done. No doubt this applies equally to "A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur"; I only say myself that I can read "The Innocents Abroad" with amusement and pleasure; "A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur" irritates me without affording the compensation of a single smile.

II

We have drifted from the dawn of history to the Middle Ages; let us go back for a minute to "A Story of the Stone Age," by H. G. Wells, and to an earlier writer, George Ebers.

In referring to his novel, "The Sisters," which is a story of Alexandria in 164 B.C., Ebers tells us: "I gave history her due, but the historic figures retired to the background beside the human beings as such; the representation of an epoch became valueless for a Human Ideal, holding good for all time."

In Mr. Wells's story, which is the third of his "Tales of Space and Time," we see his handicap in the absence of adequate knowledge, and this, it seems to me, is the chief difficulty in writing fiction about days before history was written except in petrified bone, or in scratched pictures on cave walls which may or may not be caricatures, and may or may not have the peculiar inner significance—sexual or religious or protective—which science often ascribes to them. I wrote one long-short story, and I think one only, in which the background was of necessity so inexact that I had to invent names which might or might not be true, and fill in gaps knowing that imagination had ninety-nine to a hundred chances against it. In reading Mr. Wells's story, admirably told as it is, I was constantly brought up by the thought, "Here are the children crying 'Boloo! Bayah Boloo!' with delight as the hippopotami crashing through the reeds announce the coming of spring"—but how can Mr. Wells or I *know* that they cried "Boloo! Bayah Boloo!" when there are a hundred thousand other sounds with which their delight might have been expressed? And here are Uya the Cunning Man, and Eudena his wife, and Ugh-lomi, and Andoo the huge cave-bear. I am convinced by Mr. Wells's picture of terror in those ages; that is real enough, and must have been; and no one can paint terror better (not Kipling, not W. W. Jacobs, certainly not Edgar Allan Poe) than the writer who gave us that grim, horrible, and haunting story, "The Island of Dr. Moreau." But he is on difficult ground, and ground likely to slip under his feet with any new discovery, when he writes in detail of "a time before the memory of man, before the beginning of history . . . when

one might have walked dryshod from France to England, and when a broad and sluggish Thames flowed through its marshes to meet its father Rhine" over the wide, level country which is now covered by the North Sea. When Mr. Wells wrote his story, its date was fifty thousand years ago. I do not know what thousands have been added or subtracted since, even in this short time, by science.

In one sense an historical novel dealing with unexplored and elastic ages is easy; it is a tale which "goes round without a fiddling stick," as Frolic says of a tale in the old play. But in another sense it is not so easy as it looks. The surest ground is when one deals with human nature, primitive then and primitive now—its terrors, loves, jealousies, hatreds, sacrifices, strifes.

There are two books, insufficiently appreciated, I think—and one of them perhaps almost unknown to present-day readers—on which I wish to say a few words, as they link by different methods the past with the present, or with what *was* the present within living memory. One is Henry Kingsley's "Old Margaret," written soon after the Franco-German War, which Kingsley saw as a war-correspondent. Henry was the youngest of the three brilliant brothers of whom Charles is by far the best known, though it is at least doubtful whether the author of "Geoffrey Hamlyn" and "Ravenshoe" does not deserve as wide and lasting a fame as the author of "Hypatia" (with its one great and tragic scene), "Hereward," and "Westward Ho!" At all events, "Old Margaret" is a very good historical novel indeed. Its author devised an ingenious and original plan; he took one of the world's great pictures, "The Adoration of the Lamb" by Hubert and Jan Van Eyck, to which Margaret Van Eyck's brush no doubt contributed also, and built his novel around the portraits in the picture. Margaret Van Eyck, one remembers, figures in "The Cloister and the Hearth" as helping Gerard to paint. Kingsley's novel is remarkably well written, in a bright, easy style; the characters, Philip

the Good of Burgundy, the Van Eycks, Van Dysart, Van Kenning, Sister Priscilla, and the Priest Peter, and very notably the terrible Spada of Bologna, the central figure, so likeable a cut-throat, are splendidly drawn; the atmosphere of the time is natural and convincing and shows real knowledge. How well Kingsley could write is shown in the economy of phrase here and there which can set a picture before us without verbosity or strain; for instance, here is Spada in a paragraph:

"A middle-sized bull-necked Italian of about thirty, dressed in white with crimson slashes, with a scarlet bonnet and an ostrich plume of the same colour coming down over his left shoulder; a bullet-headed man, with an eye like polished jet and a beard like closely-packed black horsehair, elasticity and vigour in his carriage, and a good-humoured rascality in every line of his face—such was the terrible Spada of Bologna."

But in "Old Margaret" is one fault which anyone attempting the historical novel might do well to notice and avoid. A blue pencil at work on the book here and there—not striking out very much, but here a word or two, there a short sentence—would improve it immensely, sacrifice nothing of moment, and leave as a result an historical novel which might challenge comparison with the very best. Henry Kingsley cannot keep his own environment altogether out of his book, though he brings it in very differently from the great offenders against complete illusion like Mark Twain. He is describing a scene in Ghent early in the fifteenth century: Ghent, where the court was, as he tells us, less drunken than that of our James I., less extravagantly costumed than that of Venice in 1200, less riotous and less ferocious than others in history; but equalled by very few for combined riot, fury, sumptuary extravagance and general dissipation. Here is a picture of a procession led by Philip of Burgundy through the snow of yester-year: "Philip in violet velvet and crimson hose; John Van Eyck in puce satin slashed with crimson; and

Sister Priscilla in most inexorable and emphatic black. Behind them the courtiers, dressed in colours which would kill Mr. Burne-Jones with envy. Behind the grey steel-coloured guards ; behind again the dull brown-coloured mob, swarming along the snow-white street, like a highland river in spate amidst snow-covered meadows." Again :

"John of Burgundy was of course Van Dysart's enemy. We in these days have done what Sieyès said *he* had done (which he had not) *Achevez la politique*. Mr. Bright speaks some sharp truths, and Auberon Herbert does the same. In the cases of Van Kenning and Mr. Bright you expect chronic radicalism, as in the cases of Auberon Herbert and Van Dysart you may depend that something is wrong in the State. We are very sorry to have to make any personal allusions in a novel ; but Mr. Auberon Herbert so nobly represents his order, that I think I have full right to speak of him in comparison with the typical Cimbrian nobleman of the thirteenth century, Van Dysart."

In the same paragraph Henry Kingsley goes on to refer to Gladstone and Lowe. In another passage, having Paris fresh in his mind, he refers to Haussmann, St. Antoine, and the march of the six hundred from Marseilles during the French Revolution. Elsewhere we find references to High Church and Low Church quarrels in England, to Lord Palmerston and Disraeli, to " His Honour Beales, M.A., Professor Beesley, and Mr. Bradlaugh." His object, of course, was to link fifteenth-century Burgundy and its politics, its commerce, its religion, its warfare, to his own day and make its life more intelligible to Victorian readers. But he was good enough artist to realize that this was really a flaw in his book. " *We are very sorry to make personal allusions in a novel.*" I should like to see " Old Margaret " re-published with these few passages eliminated. Certain colloquialisms which have a modern ring might be retained ; after all, his characters did not speak in English, even the English of their age.

There is just one unnecessary passage in this fine novel

which I read without regret, as it gives an insight into Henry Kingsley's care to make historic fiction real. He is speaking about Van Dysart in the dungeon, when he is allowed to escape only to be led by his supposed friends into the power of the Duke—a finely conceived episode:

"I happen to have been in one of the then most famous cachots in one of the most famous prisons in the whole world for a time, with the bolt shot on me, and so I can in some way gather what were Van Dysart's thoughts when he threw himself on his straw. I have been through it all myself (for five minutes) and so I may speak. The dungeon in which I was confined was at Mont St. Michel, in Normandy, a most famous dungeon, possibly engraved with the names of the prisoners who had been there before, but as it was too dark to see your hand before your face, I cannot say anything about the matter. It was the dungeon among dungeons, and when my companion on a bright happy summer's day shut me in, and shot the bolt on me, I understood it all—I knew what the old style of imprisonment meant in five minutes. The horror of darkness first, for the darkness was like a velvet mask on one's eyes; then the thought that one was caged and powerless, and could not move to help oneself; then the horrible thought that all who loved you would think that you had deserted them—your wife first, and your friends afterwards. In the cachot where I was there was no light at all as far as I could see. I had room to turn round, but little more; I could stand upright and walk eight feet one way and six another; and I was to stay here twenty-five years, hopeless, helpless, bookless, letting the world go spin while I spent a worthless life in the straw in this dark hole. I wish to notice that my cachot was not by any means the celebrated Cage de Mont St. Michel, only an ordinary cachot. Van Dysart was thrust into such a place, without the least hope of release except by death, very likely accompanied by torture."

The second book to which I refer is by a poet who achieves his desired results subtly, almost imperceptibly, with the sure but unobtrusive delicacy of night merging into dawn, of day fading into dusk and night. Sir Henry Newbolt in that fine book "The Old Country," which is at once a modern

novel, an historical novel, and a poem based on Sir Thomas Browne's saying "In Eternity there is no distinction of tenses," introduces us to a visitor to an English country house who, coming one moonlit night into the park not long before dawn, finds himself back in a lost century. All is changed yet little or nothing changed; there are another host, another hostess, another girl similar and even similarly named to the one he loves; but now it is the life of the English countryside in the time of the Black Prince; we meet Bishop Grandison of Exeter, hear of Wyclif and encounter one of his disciples emphasizing the new-old spirit of revolt and free-thought; we listen to tales of the French wars. A beautifully written, graphic, and yet dreamy and mystical book; a kind of grown-up "Alice in Wonderland" or "Alice Through the Looking-Glass," but all intensely possible and real; the pictures from actual history are memorable, for instance the story of Poitiers and of the taking of the French King. Listen to this account of the rejoicings when (on a Friday of all days, but fastings must go by the board) the bells crash out "Victory! Victory!" and Lord Brian and the Devon fighting-men clatter in:

"Since they were all Devon men, with a becoming confidence, the sound of their speech came up the hall as pleasant and as free as the wind over the heather. At Sir Henry's bidding they drank to the King, the Queen and the Royal Family, with enthusiasm; and to the Prince with a roar that seemed intended to be heard across the Channel. Then the high table rose, and left them to it. In the great gallery wines and spices were waiting on two tables by the fire. The room was ablaze with light from end to end, and hung along the walls with fresh leafage of all the richest colours of autumn. Where the armoured figures stood in their grim, unbending rank there was a wreath on every helmet, and the nearest mailed hand gripped the tarnished and moth-eaten banner of Harry's grandfather, the first Sir Henry, crowned with oak-leaves, and wound about the staff with bright new scarlet and silver. The fire, piled high with logs, gave out a clear and steady glow, that flashed on

the silver cups and flagons, and was reflected again in the polished surface of the tables on which they stood."

Sir Henry Newbolt (who has also written in "The New June" and "Taken from the Enemy," historical novels dealing respectively with the times of Richard II. and Henry IV., and with those of Napoleon) dedicated "The Old Country" to the present Archbishop of Canterbury, then Bishop of Stepney. Some of the author's comments in this dedication are of especial interest to those concerned with history and fiction. "It would seem," he says, "to be the common belief and pride of the gentlemen of England that they are descended from forefathers who were utterly different from them not only in their choice of clothes and oaths, but in habitually pursuing a behaviour which would qualify in any civilized country for solitary confinement of one sort or the other. My hero comes upon the stage afflicted with these curious delusions . . . he is more struck, when he reaches the England of 1356, by the points of similarity between the thought of the fourteenth and twentieth centuries than by the external and trivial differences, which counted for so much in the books from which his knowledge was derived." This is well and truly said. The author has been careful to translate the dialogue of his Latin and Anglo-French authorities faithfully in such a way that it could be understood when literally re-translated for the benefit of fourteenth-century Englishmen. "This," he says, "is Sir Walter Scott's method—you remember the Dedicatory Epistle to 'Ivanhoe'—and, as in Sir Walter's case, the effect is sometimes startlingly modern."

III

I am no great lover of Book Societies, Book Councils, or Readers' Guides; though they may do a certain amount of good in encouraging reading, they seem to me (and whatever heresy is here is not based on any personal grounds, as

my own books have sometimes been recommended) to do an injustice to many authors by singling out two or three of equal or sometimes even inferior merit. But there is one quite useful little elementary list of books (A Bibliography of British Historical Fiction) dealing with English history, published first in *The Reader*, approved by the Home Reading Union and issued by the National Book Council, which is worth mention. In this little Bibliography Mr. Jonathan Nield has chosen 106 novels and stories to represent British history from the time of the Romans to the late Victorian age. The Roman and Saxon periods, he says, and some of the earlier English reigns, are necessarily represented by juvenile stories by good authors. A brief analysis of this list may be useful in discussing this question of the choice of period, at least as far as our own history is concerned.

Three short stories by Kipling in "Puck of Pook's Hill" represent the Roman period in Britain, and three historical novels (one by Henty) bring us to the Norman Conquest. From Henry I. to John we have ten entries; from Henry III. to Henry VI. sixteen; Edward IV., Edward V., and Richard III. share three books; seven titles carry us from the days of Henry VII. to the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. But Elizabeth is allotted eight books. James the First and James the Second have only two apiece, but Charles the First has five, and part of Marjorie Bowen's "The Governor of England"; Charles the Second five, and part of "Lorna Doone." George the First has only three against seven dealing with the reign of George the Second, and seven dealing with that of George the Third, though the latter monarch shares books with his successors.

I do not want to draw too many conclusions from this brief list, but it deserves a little careful study. We see in the first place that the earlier days of British history show a certain dearth of fiction; it has evidently been thought easier to let the imagination run wild over prehistory and the dim and practically unknown dawn of history, than to attempt any

reconstruction of the times of the first invaders, or even the early Kings of a united Kingdom. The first notable novels given are " Harold " and " Hereward." Elizabeth—a long reign—has one more title than the whole of the four preceding monarchs. If one is not straining a point in drawing such a conclusion, the spacious days of Queen Bess, with her gentlemen adventurers, her poets, her statesmen, her lovers, the Armada, are more attractive to the novelist and reader than those of her Tudor predecessors; or else the Queen, of whom a schoolboy said, " Queen Elizabeth was known as the Virgin Queen—she was a good Queen," was herself an easier or more attractive figure than the King of whom another schoolboy wrote, " He was a very loving man." The two Charles's were attractive for various reasons, and this is shown in the list.

And now supposing we turn to the fifth and latest edition of Mr. Nield's " Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales "; Alfred the Great has nine entries in the index, Harold four, and William the Conqueror three (but there are other references to Hastings fight), John fifteen, Henry the Eighth nineteen, Elizabeth forty-four, Charles the First twenty-two, Oliver Cromwell thirty-nine, Charles the Second twenty-eight, but Richard the Second only three, Mary I. only three, Henry the Fourth one, and Richard Cromwell one. Fourteen titles stand against " Armada "; five against Magna Carta; thirteen against the name of Judge Jeffreys, and several more (but here the index is a little confusing) against that of Monmouth; four only against the Old Pretender, but twenty-nine against his more popular and more picturesque, though in many ways less admirable, son, the Young Pretender.

There is enough here to show what is fairly evident without proof: certain periods of British history are neglected, certain periods, being more picturesque in their events or in their monarchs, have been explored with considerable thoroughness. Some episodes almost tell themselves, and the actual

facts need little help from the embroideries of fiction. We have our purple patches which even the gravest historian must have some difficulty in making dull and uninteresting; the story of Harold, Duke William (still called "The Duke" by Sussex peasants) and the Conquest; the story of John and the Barons; the story of Richard the Third and Bosworth; the story of Elizabeth, Essex, the Armada, the great Queen's dreary death among her pillows; the story of Charles and Cromwell; the story of Monmouth, whose portrait done after death still moves the heart with its pale, grave beauty and sweetness; the story of the Forty-Five. As one instance of the ease with which certain periods of history lend themselves to the novelist, who has little to do except relate actual facts, take "Sanctuary" by Blanche Hardy, a novel of the days of Edward IV., Richard III., and Henry Tudor. Henry the Seventh's history alone reads like a romance in its plain telling. Fortunately for the novelist when party feelings run high, he has always two stories to select from, or to turn into a composite. Cromwell may be a villain and traitor, or a patriot; Charles a saint, or a double-dealer and tyrant. Richard of Gloucester may be the Richard of Shakespeare, and Sir Thomas More (if his biography was really his) of Stevenson, of Miss Oman, or Miss Marjorie Bowen.

In his "Essay on Some French Novelists," that veteran and extremely able critic, George Saintsbury, says: "All who have studied the philosophy of novel-writing at all closely know that great historical events are bad subjects, or are only good subjects on one condition—a condition the steady observance of which constitutes one of the great merits of Sir Walter Scott. The central interest in all such cases must be connected with a wholly fictitious personage, or one of whom sufficiently little is known to give the romancer free play. When this condition is complied with, the actual historical events may be, and constantly have been, used with effect as aids in developing the story and working out

the fortunes of the characters. Dumas himself has observed this law in his more successful efforts; he has not observed it in 'Le Collier de la Reine.' If Scott, instead of writing 'The Abbot' and making Catherine Seyton the heroine, had taken the Court of Holyrood before the death of Darnley as his subject, and had made Mary his central figure, he would almost assuredly have failed."

Even Mr. Arnold Bennett, in "Books and Persons," admits that Professor Saintsbury is "a regular Albert Memorial of learning," and Bennett places him at the head of "the professional squad"—though, to be sure, Mr. Bennett seems now to have taken that position himself.

In this matter of the great historical event I am in two minds, just as I am about the "canon" of another critic that great historical characters also make bad subjects. It depends entirely, perhaps, on who is dealing with events and personages. I do not think a young writer will be wise to challenge comparison at once with writers of established fame in these fields. He will do better to take the byways of history, to concentrate interest on the smaller figures. Leslie Stephen—not, perhaps, a great critic—wrote once to Thomas Hardy: "I can only tell you what is my own taste, but I rather think that my taste is in this case the common one. I think that an historical character in a novel is almost always a nuisance; but I like to have a bit of history in the background, so to speak; to find that George the Third is just round the corner, though he does not present himself in full front."

In George Eliot's "Middlemarch" we find one of the characters, Timothy Cooper, saying: "I'm seen lots o' things turn up sin' I war a young un—the war an' the peace, an' the canells, an' the ould King George, an' the Regent, an' the new King George, an' the new un as has got a new ne-ame—an' its been all aloike to the poor man. . . . This is the big folks's world, this is."

The young novelist will do well to bear Timothy Cooper

in mind. But if he brings the big folks on the scene against the background of the big and epical events, and forgets the little folks, he is, in a thousand cases to one, inviting disaster; nor will his fall be the fall of Swift—"like an Empire falling."

X.—GOING FOREIGN

"For to behold and for to see
The wonders of this world so wide——"
RUDYARD KIPLING.

I

I HAVE not finished yet with the choice of period.

If the mainroads of our own history have been fairly well explored (but not by any means thoroughly explored), there are as many byways, lanes, bridle-paths, field-paths, as there are in the English countryside itself, or were until recent years allowed our old freedoms to be encroached upon. Until Scott opened his eyes, Dumas never thought the history of France interesting. It is a remarkable fact that we have so few English novelists of the very first rank who have written novels of the very first rank about our own country. Scott, who after all is often better on his own soil, was a Scot; Charles Reade placed the scenes of his great historical novel in Holland, Germany, France, and Italy—almost anywhere but in England itself. Kingsley's "Westward Ho!", a great book by a novelist not superlatively great, derives much of its interest from sea-wanderings and the Spanish Main. Ainsworth, James, and Lytton are not to be compared with Scott, Dumas, Hugo, Thackeray, Reade, Manzoni, and Tolstoy. The best French historical novels take France for their background, and are helplessly lost when they cross the Channel. The Russians find Russia vast enough as a canvas; Tolstoy, of course, first of all; but also Gogol (who wrote a memorable novel of the Ukraine or "Little Russia" in the fifteenth century in "Taras Bulba," which tells of the struggle against the Turks and of a Free Cossack island-Republic),

Polevoy, Zagóskin, Lazhétchnikoff, and many others. In Germany Feuchtwanger, though he has written a play about Warren Hastings the historical accuracy of which has been warmly disputed and defended, turns to German lands for his fiction; so do most of the recent German historical novelists—Jacob Wassermann, author of "The Triumph of Youth" (a grim story ending happily of the clash between old and new), Neumann and all the rest of that regiment of Teutonic writers who, over-praised as many of them have been, mark a curious development in the literature of a nation not previously greatly distinguished for its novels; Sudermann, save for a few morbid and sadistic novelists, stood almost alone. Neumann, it is true, went to the France of Louis XI.—and of Quentin Durward—for "The Deuce." Italians, Spaniards, Scandinavians like Selma Lagerlöff, Gunnar Gunnarsson, Sigrid Undset, were content for the most part with their own countries and annals. In a recent novel, "In the Wilderness," Sigrid Undset brings her hero to mediæval London.

It is perhaps characteristic of our own people that even in imagination they must wander afield, and find their Empire over-sea. Scott takes us to France, Flanders, Holland, India, Switzerland, Germany, Turkey, Syria. Thackeray, though "Esmond" is essentially English, carries us across to Flanders, as he does in "Vanity Fair," and has an eye on the new world as in "The Virginians." Dickens, in the more notable of his two historical novels, is attracted by the French Revolution, which also inspired Trollope to write his only serious historical novel; Shorthouse went (in imagination) to Italy; as did George Eliot, both in imagination and fact. Of our more recent novelists Hewlett, though more thoroughly English than most, begins "The Queen's Quair" in France, and gives us only a glance at England in "Richard Yea-and-Nay"; Normandy and the British possessions in France, and Sicily and Palestine fill most of his pages in this splendid book. His stories of

Italy are, on the whole, more successful than those placed on English soil. Stanley Weyman wrote some fine historical novels with an English setting in "The Castle Inn" (mid-eighteenth century), "Shrewsbury" (late seventeenth—and a better novel, I think, than is generally admitted), "Starvecrow Farm" (early nineteenth), "Ovington's Bank" (second quarter of the nineteenth century—the account of the run on the bank is admirable), and two or three others. But as a rule he went farther afield: to the Netherlands, to Switzerland, to Germany, but especially to France. His "Under the Red Robe" seems to me his finest book, if only for the magnificent plot in which he has made such skilful use of Richelieu and "The Day of Dupes." You remember how Gil de Berault rides into Paris through the Orleans Gate on a November night, and, at the corner of the Luxembourg, sees a coach followed by two outriders sweep out of the Palace courtyard at a great pace. "I reined my jaded horse on one side to give it room," he says, and, one of the leather curtains flapping back, "saw for a second by the waning light a face inside—a face and no more, and that only for a second. But it froze me. It was Richelieu's, the Cardinal's; but not as I had been wont to see it—keen, cold, acute, with intellect and indomitable will in every feature. This face was contorted with the rage of impatience, was grim with the fever of haste, and the fear of death. The eyes burned under the pale brow, the moustache bristled, the teeth showed through the beard; I could fancy the man crying, "Faster! Faster!" and gnawing his nails in the impotence of passion; and I shrank back as if I had been struck."

But Gil de Berault himself is in fear of death from the Cardinal for allowing Cochefôret to escape.

Gil goes to his lodging in the Rue Savonnerie (Weyman knows his eighteenth-century Paris well, even the smells and sounds of it) and his little tailor-host, Frison, tells him that the Cardinal is disgraced. The next day, when Gil

de Berault goes to the Hôtel Richelieu to surrender himself, he finds in the courtyard, where generally at the levée a score of coaches and thrice as many servants were waiting, emptiness and sunshine and stillness. The officer on guard, twirling his moustaches, stares at him in wonder; the lackeys, whispering among themselves, grin at his appearance; the major-domo at the door of the ante-chamber looks at him in surprise and embarrassment.

He is allowed to enter; and finds the room empty.

At the great Cardinal's levée he is the only client! When he is ushered in, "the stillness and silence all seemed to be concentrated here, and to give to the man I saw before me a dignity which he had never possessed for me when the world passed through his doors, and the proudest fawned on him for a smile. He sat in a great chair on the farther side of the hearth, a little red skull-cap on his head, his fine hands lying still in his lap. The collar of lawn which fell over his cape was quite plain, but the skirts of his red robe were covered with rich lace, and the order of the Holy Ghost, a white dove on a gold cross, shone on his breast. Among the multitudinous papers on the great table near him I saw a sword and pistols; and some tapestry that covered a little table behind him failed to hide a pair of spurred riding-boots."

Gil finds him mild, benign, not at all terrible; until his visitor tells how, as a man of honour, he has let Cochefôret go and is come to pay the penalty. Richelieu does not understand at first that he has not taken advantage of his master's sudden fall. When they go through the rooms together, where are only bowing lackeys, and return to the Cardinal's chamber, Richelieu says: "Well, you are fortunate, M. de Berault. Yesterday I had a hundred clients; today I have but one, and I cannot afford to hang him. But for your liberty—that is another matter." His sentence is in effect that Gil shall marry the woman he loves.

In this book we find, I think, Stanley Weyman at his best; and, even remembering his limitations, his best is very good indeed. But his best (or so it seems to me) is generally done on the soil of seventeenth-century France, where he comes nearer to Dumas than any other English writer.

Henry Christopher Bailey has placed a number of his more notable novels in England, but makes excursions to France, Germany, Italy, the Low Countries, the Peninsula, and Jamaica. Marjorie Bowen (Mrs. Arthur L. Long), who has written about fifty books of which thirty are historical novels, began with a very successful and brilliant if immature book, "The Viper of Milan," and has taken her backgrounds chiefly from England, Italy, and Holland. But she has introduced also into her novels Spain, Sweden and Norway, Russia, France (in several books, one being a romance about Vauvenargues in "The Quest of Glory"), America (in "Mr. Washington"), and Tyrol in one of her best books, "The Golden Roof." Rafael Sabatini is another very industrious and deservedly popular writer. Italy is the scene of much of his work, but we have an excellent illustration of his treatment of English history in "The Tavern Knight" and of French in "Bardelys the Magnificent." Mrs. Champion de Crespigny, who has also made a name for herself lately as a writer of detective fiction, began with a very striking first novel of France in 1720, "From Behind the Arras." Hilaire Belloc's one historical novel, "The Girondin," tells its story in the title, as James Blyth does his in "Napoleon Decrees." Percy Brebner has written of Germany and the Low Countries as well as of England. Joseph Conrad, Thomas Hardy, Eden Phillpotts, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—the last four essentially English writers—have all been influenced in their historical fiction by the Napoleonic Legend, as has also Mr. Ford Madox Ford, whose "A Little Less Than Gods" really gives us two historical novels in one, the

first, and far the better, dealing with Napoleon's escape from Elba, the second part with Ney. Warwick Deeping, best known through novels other than historical, seems to have preferred English backgrounds, but he wrote at least one novel the scenes of which are laid in France, "Bertrand of Brittany," Bertrand being Bertrand du Guesclin. Margaret L. Woods places the scene of her "Sons of the Sword" in the Peninsula. Crosbie Garstin carries his Cornish squires far abroad. "May Wynne" goes abroad for many of her backgrounds.

II

I do not know whether we may draw any definite conclusions from the few instances I have given; but they do suggest to me that England, our little island in the silver sea, has appeared to offer too limited a field to most of our historical writers. A careful, though of course by no means exhaustive, study of this branch of literature in which I work myself, makes me inclined to think that—

(1) Our best work has been done (with, of course, many exceptions) where Great Britain and continental countries with which our history has been intimately connected are linked together.

(2) The best American work has its roots in the brief but none the less eventful history of the New World; the second-best work going back to the wide and almost vacant spaces of early world-history, or even prehistory. American writers—again with many exceptions—are less successful when they attempt English or continental history.

(3) The best continental work has as a background the history of the country in which it is written. When a French writer wanders into English history, for instance, he is often hopelessly at sea. And yet in Jusserand France has given us one of the best historians on the old life of England, and in Taine, Chevalley, Maurois and several

others, some of the best critics of our literature; Chevalley discovered the importance of Deloney as an historical novelist rather than play-wright.

No country, not even the smallest, is entirely happy in being altogether without annals; Monaco, Andorra, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, might each furnish the novelist with materials for a hundred novels of the past. Possibly long continuity in English history has given the impression that it is not very interesting; possibly its cohesion has, while making easier the task of the serious historian, made it less attractive even to native writers than the more broken history of France with its early Duchies and Principalities, and later violent changes; of Italy with its Papal States, Tyrannies, Republics; of Germany before the last Empire with its petty Kingdoms, Bishoprics, Grand Duchies, and Free Towns. I do not think this should be so. We are as a people curiously apathetic towards our own annals, where a wealth of material waits discovery and use, just as we are curiously unappreciative of our own native talent and appreciative of that of other races. English musicians have had to change their names to secure recognition; our stage, even our British Broadcasting, often indicates the same preference; a British Encyclopædia invites a German novelist to write upon novels in preference to any British critics. If I were inclined to cynicism, I should suggest to a young novelist attempting the historical novel that his easiest way to fame is to adopt a Teutonic or Russian name, to place his scene in some continental country likely to be entirely unfamiliar to his readers, to flavour liberally with the coarse, the violent, even the pornographic, to observe certain stereotyped conventions, and to select a period of which nobody in this country knows anything at all. He will be almost certain to find one or two eminent critics who will give him a good send-off by acclaiming his intimate knowledge and his originality, and will compare him with obviously native novelists to their disadvantage and his

own laudation. As I have no particular inclination towards cynicism, I will only give two instances to confirm some of my remarks.

A writer of my acquaintance wrote a series of stories on Japan, a country he had never visited. Another friend of mine who knew Japan ran through these, found innumerable blunders (which it is particularly easy to make in writing of an Eastern country where even the manner in which a kimono is worn may have an immense significance), and volunteered to correct the writer's mistakes. "Thanks very much," was the reply, "but I'd rather publish the stories as they are. Editors, critics, and readers have preconceived ideas about Japan, and would be sure, if I were right on these matters, to point out that I was wrong. One has to conform to certain conventional outlines."

In the second case a distinguished English writer wrote a book on the Great War which had, certainly, a good press and a considerable success. He did not conceal its horrors or even its sordidness and loathsomeness, but dealt with them with a certain reserve and sensitiveness, even sometimes with an apology, as a gentleman would in having to refer as a duty to unpleasant matters. A German writer, no doubt equally honest and well-intentioned, but with a mind less scrupulous and of coarser grain, painted everything in unsoftened colours, setting down things which no English writer would be allowed to set down without protest. His book had a colossal sale. Certain critics applauded it as a revelation of war which would do an invaluable work for peace; certain libraries, while others banned it (and here I am not endorsing censorships, which defeat their own ends), bought unprecedented numbers of copies on the ground that it was a work of genius calculated to help peace by showing bluntly the disgusting details of war. Now I have heard this book discussed many times; I have been in a library when I have seen women clamouring to get hold of the first free copy. Because it shows war

in its true colours, and teaches something not to be learnt elsewhere, and that unaided imagination cannot picture it? No; but because word has gone round that matters tabooed in decent society are openly discussed in this book, and may be read in secret and enjoyed—as a certain French Marquise enjoyed telling her embarrassed confessor again and again of sins long ago acknowledged and absolved.

Scott started a tradition of clean writing, which has been honourably followed by our own historical novelists; G. P. R. James, long ago, said with modest pride that he had always endeavoured to write books which should appeal to the better and not the baser instincts of his readers. We are, as I say, a curious people. I have the greatest admiration for Guy de Maupassant's best work; for "Boule de Suif" and "La Maison Tellier," unpleasant as the environment of those stories is. But I have reviewed translated stories of his, brought into daylight from an obscurity in which they might as well have been left; and I am confident that if these stories had been sent under an English name as English work to any English editor or publisher, they would have been contemptuously rejected, or, if published, would have been banned in this country as certain English books far more innocuous have been banned. But I would have no censorship, which does far more harm than good; let each keep his own censor within himself.

III

After this aside, let me sum up in a few lines what I have said about the choice of period, and make a few suggestions. The choice of a period very long ago makes the work of the novelist easier in some respects, as where knowledge is incomplete or inexact he has more latitude and wider scope for the free play of imagination. But there is the danger of dulness, of lack of verisimilitude, and, almost always, of being found out ultimately when human knowledge

is more complete. Those who, like the young writer who wrote to me on the exploration of the far past, are anxious to deal with the dim and misty ages, might study carefully the methods of Rudyard Kipling in some of his "Puck of Pook's Hill" stories (but with a little more regard to such facts as have been ascertained than he displays in his references to Wayland Smith), or H. de Vere Stacpoole's story of Athens in the time of Socrates, "The Street of the Flute Player," or John Buchan in the earlier parts of "The Path of the King," or (especially) Naomi Mitchison. In part of her recent work she has essayed a kind of superficial hardness and detachment which are very effective; she is laconic, and yet the human note does most certainly show through her method convincingly and notably.

When one leaves quite early times the authorities and surviving relics multiply until gradually the wealth of accumulated knowledge (a good deal of it, alas, inaccurate) makes it necessary for the writer to keep a clear sight of the trees because of the denseness of the wood. In any case, with a first book there is an eagerness to pack in too much, and it is as well to remember Stevenson's saying that if he knew how to omit he would know everything. Certain periods will commend themselves as being more picturesque than others. The time of the renaissance in Italy, the Elizabethan age in England, the Carolean age and the earlier years of the eighteenth century, the era of the Napoleonic struggle, are all attractive and coloured; but it will be as well not to challenge comparison at first with a period already well (though not, of course, exhaustively) worked by experienced and even great writers. A novel on Mary of Scots, on the murder of the Duke of Guise, on St. Bartholomew's, on the Young Pretender, or on Napoleon, brings to mind at once innumerable books by writers of established fame with whose work a new novel based on similar facts will inevitably be compared. Here the safer course is to take some minor issue, and make the

great events a background to smaller characters and issues.

But it is important above all that the period is one in which the writer himself takes an interest. Human minds are to a curious extent divided into water-tight compartments. I remember a friend of mine, at once a barrister and clergyman and writer, saying that he took no interest at all in any history except the history of Greece and Rome, and in that of the eighteenth century. The connection between the classic ages and that century which primed itself so much on being modelled on a classic past—in which "in the sunset was Jason's fleece of gold"—is obvious. The Middle Ages, the Tudors, the Renaissance, the Napoleonic period and the nineteenth century interested him not at all, or hardly at all. A different type of educated mind finds its main interest, perhaps, in mediæval days, in Jacobite days, or in times more modern.

IV

When a period has been chosen (and the fascination of a certain period to the writer may well form the germ of his book) there comes the task of studying its life and history. This is of immense importance if serious work is to be done, and is perhaps the most delightful part of a book's making. My own experience is that the most difficult part is to complete the rough plot by working out, largely as a rule while actually writing, its interactions and minor details; to preserve balance and proportion, and to assemble the parts of the whole design in such a way that all runs naturally and smoothly. But first one must soak oneself in the chosen period, reading everywhere and everything, passing from one authority to another, checking, forming one's own judgment on conflicting evidence, going if possible to original documents, deciding what to use and what to omit, determining where imagina-

tion may legitimately fill in gaps and come to the aid of recorded history.

As I have said before, it is of very great importance to know how to use books and where to go for knowledge. This is largely, of course, a matter of training and experience. There are the standard histories, and one should have some knowledge as to their relative importance and reliability. Frequently even more useful are contemporary memoirs, topographies, old magazine and newspaper articles, forgotten or half-forgotten books which contain, probably amid much dross, a little gold of not generally known fact. Small things which a grave historian may often toss aside as unimportant to main issues are of immense value to the historical novelist. When I was writing, for instance, of the Peninsular War in "Running Horse Inn," and in some of my short stories, I found the memoirs of soldiers of the day not only excellent reading but most useful in supplying sidelights on what actually occurred in the experience of individuals; though comparatively little was used, these personal records, studied in the British Museum, and some lent me for the purpose by my friend Dr. Holland Rose, the leading authority on that period, gave me a sense of the colour and movement of the time which more official histories failed to supply.

There are several reference books which aim at suggesting the best books on a given character or period. For practical purposes I have perhaps found the most useful of all reference books the "Dictionary of National Biography," in spite of its occasional inaccuracies. The bibliographies at the end of each article show one where to look for fuller information. The "Encyclopædia Britannica" is of course useful; on a smaller scale, but sometimes more informing and even in certain cases more accurate, is the admirable "Chambers's Encyclopædia." It is useful to refer frequently to the "New English Dictionary," where the quotations will be a help in avoiding anachronisms in words and facts.

Books on folklore, books like Brewer's "Phrase and Fable," and "Readers' Handbook," are excellent supplements to the serious histories one consults. And then there are the State Papers, Camden Society reprints, "Notes and Queries" (immensely useful), the invaluable Bohn, Haydn's Dates, Collections like Rushforth's, and, in fact, any book old or new within the author's reach which deals even remotely with the period chosen.

The historical novelist must study books on costume, on coinage, on the contemporary history of other States; he must read contemporary letters, diaries, despatches, even legal documents and medical works. Nothing dealing with his period and locality should be foreign to him. He may have to go to works on heraldry, on botany, on etymology, on arboriculture, on agriculture. Picture galleries and museums, cathedrals and churches and castles, all yield their spoils. When I was writing "The Red Cravat" I explored the museums of Berlin and the palaces of Potsdam; drank beer in Auerbach's Kellar in Leipsic, and made a winter journey through the snow to the little hunting-palace of König's Wusterhausen, being amply repaid by many interesting "finds." In an obscure little museum in a side-street in Berlin, for instance, I discovered a glass drinking-mug of the first half of the eighteenth century on which was painted a portrait of one of my chief characters, Gundling, the Chamberlain and Court Fool of Frederick William I. In the Prussian War Museum I found life-size pictures of the Giant Grenadiers with whose history and records my story was concerned; in the Postal Museum were models of country-vehicles used in Prussia at the date of my story. My own practice is to visit and sometimes to live for months or even longer among the scenes of my book whenever that is practicable, or to draw upon memories of earlier travel. I drew partly upon memory for my references to the Peninsula in "Running Horse Inn," and it was gratifying when the book was republished many years

later to have a communication from Spain in which a reader, quite unknown to me, referred to the accuracy of my picture. "Brave Earth" meant a train-tramp-car-and-ship journey with a rucksack and a portable typewriter in Devon and Cornwall, and a long stay in a cottage in Cornwall in a hamlet closely associated with the incidents in the book. "Here Comes an Old Sailor" was partly written at a cottage within half a mile or so of Fordwich, the home of my hero, Thomas Mariner; I was able to see many mediæval features of the neighbourhood not usually accessible, and in the Canterbury Library was allowed to examine, by the courtesy of the librarian, the Custumal or code of laws and regulations of the little Cinque Port round which most of the events centred. "Queen Dick" meant expeditions to the Fens and the Cromwell country, and a careful study of many contemporary tracts, printed books and manuscripts. In a book on modern life it is an old rule and a good rule that the author should not go too far from his own experience; Dickens, who was unsurpassed in his pictures of the life with which he was familiar, has often been criticized for his failure to represent the aristocracy; "Ouida" made some appalling blunders over sport, and her description of a rowing eight in which her hero pulled harder than the rest is classic. There have been a few instances in which a writer has dealt truthfully and successfully with things beyond his immediate knowledge. Hewlett said he really knew little of Italy, but that the shorter the time spent in a country the better one got the key to it. Harrison Ainsworth wrote his famous description of Dick Turpin's ride to York (as a matter of fact it was not Dick Turpin who performed that memorable feat) without ever having been over the ground; he wrote it, at a gallop himself, from the map. There is one topographical blunder in that extraordinary fine novel "The Bridge of San Luis Rey" which was due to the fact that Thornton Wilder had never visited the scene of his story. Dumas always

liked to have personal knowledge of the scenes of his books. He went, for instance, to Boulogne when writing "The Three Musketeers," and to Blois when writing his play "Henry III." A map is often extraordinarily useful, and an author in writing a topographical novel should have close at hand the map of his chosen district, plans of towns as they were at the date of his story, drawings of buildings, and guide-books old and new. Stevenson, it will be remembered, loved maps, and found it hard to believe that there were people who did not care for them. George Gissing also confessed that he dearly loved a map.

The writer of an historical novel should find topographical difficulties the least that confront him; it is less easy to reconstruct the actual life of a past age where he has to draw men and women like himself, yet different from himself, and put himself into their skins; the most successful books, Stevenson has said, are those where the writer feels himself one of the characters. Old maps are plentiful even of far distant centuries. Old houses still exist; in our own country we have traces of many occupations of many people. Within easy distance of where I am now writing I can find survivals of the ancient Britons, of Rome, of Saxons and Danes, of Normans and Plantagenets; there are a castle of Stephen's reign, a Saxon cemetery, monastic houses of the Middle Ages, houses of Huguenot weavers; I buy tobacco at a house which stood more than fifty years before Richard the Third lost his crown. And, in this world, the ages of mankind, if one can travel far enough, exist in the present hour. In Morocco before the War I found negro slaves guarding doorways, prisoners starving to death (unless charity stepped in to help them) on the beaten mud of prisons; in Tunis, by the dreary and scanty ruins of Carthage, peasants cultivated their fields as they were cultivated in the time of the Punic Wars. The other day a lecturer was describing the mediæval village in England, and an Irish friend of mine said to me afterwards, "But exactly

the same conditions prevailed in my boyhood in out-of-the-way parts of Ireland. Houses or hovels were similarly built; meat was salted, and I never remember the peasants having fresh meat at all; the life was exactly the same." And so, if one knows where to go, one may reconstruct the past from the present. Witchcraft still obtains in certain parts of our own East and West. I have had children begging me for "largesse" on Suffolk roads. In Essex there still exist villages far from the railway some of whose inhabitants have never seen a train; I have met some who believe in demoniac possession and exorcism (possibly they are right) and have had difficulty in understanding the speech of villagers living within fifty miles or so of London. But it is far harder work to write a novel about people dead long ago, wearing strange and very different clothing, using different implements, living in a different environment, speaking a speech which we should find it difficult to understand today, obeying different laws, having different thoughts about the world and the heavens, than to write about those we meet and talk with and mix with every day. A common humanity under all diversities is the one link out of the iron of which can be forged a key to the chamber of understanding.

In his very interesting life of Watts-Dunton, published a good many years ago now, Mr. James Douglas said that with a few exceptions (he could count them on ten fingers) novelists of the day seemed to write only about things of which they clearly knew nothing. This can be said, I am afraid, of a number of writers loosely styled historical novelists, to the great detriment of the serious historical novel. Wardour Street may no doubt have its uses, and perhaps its excuses. In my rooms are some excellent reproductions of Stuart chairs; they are not genuine, and would not deceive an expert, but at least they convey some idea of the actual furniture of the period, and so serve a purpose roughly. I should not be surprised if Wardour Street novels have succeeded in leading many readers on

to a study of things as they really were in the past. Andrew Lang thought so. He spoke, twenty years or so ago, of an American critic who had written in half-despair of his countrymen because some silly novels pretending to be historical were having huge sales. Lang thought the symptom good rather than bad; the imagination of readers of these books carried them beyond crudities. "They dwell with tragedy and with Mary Stuart, though she be the Mary Stuart of a dull, incompetent scribbler. They may hear of Scott and Dumas, and follow them."

But today there should surely be no need for novelists whose only ideas are that a Mass and a Marry, and the use of an archaic word or two like "gypsire" or "dagswain," are sufficient to turn an essentially modern novel into an historical novel. Sir Charles Oman has written lately about a film he saw in which there was a charge by British Lancers at the Battle of Waterloo, where no Lancers were present. No doubt those who saw the film, and had no intimate knowledge of history, came away with a stronger impression of the battle than before—but how much better if that impression were accurate even in its details!

XI.—MISTAKES OF HISTORY AND OF FICTION

"Ficta voluptatis causa sint proxima veris"
(Let fiction meant to please be very near to truth).—HORACE.

I

DUMAS, that doughty champion of his own craft, was always breaking lances with the strict historian. He said patronizingly of Lamartine's history of the Girondins that the author had raised history to the dignity of fiction, and remarked elsewhere that the historical novel was not only more interesting than history, but more accurate. In one passage Victor Hugo makes the same or a similar claim.

There need really be no quarrel between the historian and the novelist, but when historical fiction is tossed aside with contempt it may be as well to remember that the historical novelist has to base his work very largely upon the work of the historian, and often finds it a difficult task to determine which of the many historians he may safely take as guide. Most of the old stories once taught as history are being gradually discredited. We hear that King Arthur is a myth; that King Alfred burned no cakes; that the importance of Magna Charta to the common people has been over-emphasized, and that King John did not actually sign the Charter. There are disputes about the characters of Richard III., Henry VII., Henry VIII., Elizabeth, Mary, William of Orange, Oliver Cromwell and Richard Cromwell, George IV., and even so recent a monarch as Queen Victoria. We find there is some doubt whether Joan of Arc should or should not have been burned, and whether, indeed, she ever was burned at all. We are told that Wellington never said "Up

Guards and At 'Em," that Nelson's message did not run "England Expects Every Man To Do His Duty," and that he did not really say "Kiss me, Hardy." I do not know how many people nowadays read Archbishop Whately's "Historic Doubts" about Napoleon, a famous book in its day; it was published in 1819. I read it as a schoolboy, and have recently reread it with as keen an appreciation, though his argument, an apology for Christianity, cuts both ways, and the reader cannot help feeling (at least, that is what I felt even as a boy) that if there is so much doubt about a man who lived almost within the last century, the learned and extremely ingenious author can scarcely expect one to be persuaded into deciding *on those grounds* that what happened two thousand years ago should be accepted without question. His argument about Napoleon may be stated thus in abstract:

The accounts of Napoleon Bonaparte vary absolutely; some say he was a genius, some a mediocrity, some brave, some a coward.

The French were most unlikely to have rewarded his frequent failures by giving him fresh armies to lose, or to have shown appreciation of his disasters in Egypt by making him Consul and Emperor.

People take things for granted, and believe what they are told by others, and any story pleasing to the imagination is accepted without careful investigation. Englishmen were especially apt to discredit foreign newspapers and accept the statements of their own with credulity; yet practically all newspapers are simply repetitions of one account. People are apt to believe what is often repeated. Whately refers to La Place's "Essai Philosophique sur les Probabilités," and to his remark that when a story has gone through twenty mouths only an eighth of the remainder can be accepted as true. It was in the interest of the newspapers to find wonderful news, and Bonaparte was also very useful as a political bugbear. It was not agreed whether Napoleon

in person, or Augureau, led the charge over the bridge of Lodi. The guide at Waterloo was probably an impostor and a liar, and his story a fraud. There was a discrepancy of three or four hours as to when Waterloo began. Nobody could say whether Borodino was a victory or not; both sides claimed it.

The stories of the Egyptian massacres, of English gentlemen being detained for twelve years in French prisons, of an island so near France as Elba being chosen for the first exile, and of a low-born adventurer attaining almost universal power, were all wildly improbable.

The accounts of Trafalgar varied in England and in France.

It was not proved that English people really saw Napoleon on the *Bellerophon*; they may only have seen a man in a cocked hat, and been told, "That is Napoleon."

The Greek translation of his name, "Lion of the Forest," was applied in old days to a general of fabulous valour; he may have been merely a personification of legendary valour, beaten by the English (who, in their own belief, always win) and made into a kind of epic of English success and bravery.

Archbishop Whately worked out his brilliant idea with a solemnity and completeness worthy of Defoe. He followed up the book in subsequent editions with additional arguments; for instance, a New Orleans paper had proved on the authority of an American traveller—"one of that great nation whose accuracy as to facts is so well known"—that Moscow was never really burned, but only some ramshackle buildings surrounding Moscow; that it was hardly likely the Allies really entered Paris as conquerors, since the *Moniteur* did not mention any military transactions on that day, but only certain theatrical performances; that there was no evidence that the corpse supposed to have been transported from St. Helena to the Invalides was anything but a bundle of unknown bones; and that Prince Louis

Napoleon's frustrated invasion of a great Power like France with only fifty-five men at his back, was really a concocted and improbable story showing that Napoleon was a legend and never actual flesh and blood, a legend which, like all legends, cropped up again from time to time.

This exceedingly brilliant book serves one purpose; after reading it one is cautious about accepting all that is called history as fact.

Sir Walter Raleigh—the first and more famous Sir Walter—once looked from a prison window on a street tumult. Three witnesses saw that tumult, and the three accounts were absolutely contradictory. Miss Marjorie Bowen has pointed out the totally contradictory descriptions of the Young Pretender.

Hume, who has been described as the first to give literary charm to English history, in his account of the murder of Comyn makes Kirkpatrick ask the hesitating Bruce, "And is that a matter to be left to conjecture?" It is certain that Kirkpatrick never said anything so modern at such a moment. William Robertson, the great Scottish historian, said of Rizzio that his low birth and indigent condition placed him in a station where he ought to have remained unknown to posterity, had not his fortune and sufferings compelled history "to descend from its dignity to record his adventures." Thus history, at all events, as conceived by the older historians, gives a very partial picture, ignoring the ordinary, everyday man. Victor Hugo explained his preference for romance over history by saying that he preferred moral truth to historic truths. Mr. M. P. Shiel, in the opening paragraph of his curious historical novel of Henry the Eighth's time, "Cold Steel," begins by saying, "The literary historians have not always recorded the most interesting or the most important facts of history. They tell us of the Battle of the Spurs, but not of the incidents of Luther's youth." (This is not strictly correct; a good deal has been written of Luther's early life at Eisleben.)

Macaulay, speaking of the histories of his own day, said, "Good histories, in the proper sense of the word, we have not. But we have good historical romances." His words will not apply to today when we have many good historians and good histories; but his Essay on Hallam, published just over a century ago (in September, 1828), is interesting as showing his attitude to the historical novel, then in much favour owing to the immense success of the Waverley Novels. "To make the past present, to bring the distant near, to place us in the presence of a great man, or on the eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle, to invest with the reality of flesh and blood beings whom we are too much inclined to consider as personified qualities in an allegory, to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners, and garb, to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, to rummage their old-fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous furniture, these parts of the duty which properly belongs to the historian have been appropriated by the historical novelist." But history has often acted on the principle laid down by Anatole France that it is an art and therefore should be written with imagination. Froude admitted that he did not pretend to accuracy. "Gossip is charming!" says Cecil Graham in "Lady Windermere's Fan," and adds, "History is merely gossip," as it very often certainly is. It has given us, if Lord Acton is right, quite a false idea of Marie Antoinette, who was, he says, certainly not very good-looking, and wore a very tall headdress to conceal the fact that she was so terribly short. If he is right, the "queen with a fair face" in "A Tale of Two Cities" needs amendment. Stevenson speaks somewhere of young men who have escaped the perils of the Freemans. Edna Lyall, who was always very careful as to detail, was hindered in writing "To Right the Wrong" by a sudden discovery that Hampden's recorded last words were based on a fraudulent pamphlet. John Hampden, in the view

of some historians, is by no means entitled to the immense position he holds in history, just as Judge Jeffreys has been exonerated to some extent by Lord Birkenhead and others; personally I see little reason to acquit Jeffreys, though we may admit that he was better-looking than he has been assumed to be—if that is in his favour. The great drawback in history of the new school, which, after all, I think on the whole the history we must rank most highly as really history, is that it cannot stretch points in favour of tradition. Yet tradition is of immense value and importance, and the established tradition of the East about Hampden, and of the West about Jeffreys, ought not to go for nothing when we have reached the frontier of ascertained facts. That other Judges have been bullies and cruel, and that there were not so many victims of Monmouth's rising as had formerly been supposed, seem to me of comparatively little importance in judging the Judge himself. I think Hampden remains a great patriot, and Jeffreys a pretty scoundrel, when all is said.

Louis XI. is another favourite character in historical fiction who has suffered many changes since Scott drew him in "Quentin Durward," which, after all, embodied the popular conception of that monarch in France, where this novel had an immense success. M. Pierre Champion in a recent book, for instance, has painted Louis as a rather dull man of affairs. The account books of his reign certainly credit him with some kindly actions. But then Scott had his own views as to the use of history in fiction; W. J. Dawson, in his "Makers of English Fiction," says that he regarded history as a treasure for the plunderer, who naturally takes whatever he wants and rejects what is useless to him. His Louis XI. is no doubt an incomplete picture, partially true, and certainly exaggerated for his own purposes. And what are we to say of Charles the Bold? Dawson suggests that no sensible readers expect sound history in fiction, though they may unwillingly swallow a good deal of fiction in

history. My own view is that the sounder the history the better is the novel; but it is undoubtedly true that the lover of serious history is compelled to swallow unwillingly and unwittingly a good deal of fiction in it, just as the vegetarian will unwillingly and unwittingly swallow a good many caterpillars in the course of an otherwise meatless and blameless life.

Dean Inge, criticizing what he called "prevalent historicism," refers to the disputed question among historians as to whether St. George killed dragons or was a dishonest Army contractor who poisoned the Roman soldiers with bad beef, and whether St. Joan was all that French patriotism, the Pope, and Mr. Shaw have declared her to be, or simply a barmaid who became a regimental mascot; he goes on to comment on the little we know for certain about the things in history that really matter. "The motives for falsifying history," he says, "are in exact proportion to the interest of posterity in knowing the truth. . . . Consider the patriotic figments on which the children of all countries are brought up, and the wars caused by the national arrogance and hatred so fostered." A book was published not long ago entitled "A Chain of Error in Scottish History" (M. V. Hay), which urges the revision of the historical works published during the last three centuries, and reveals the mistakes of some of the most eminent historians. Professor Rait, the Historiographer Royal for Scotland, tells us of an early seventeenth-century work printed in Paris, which caused much excitement by casting doubt upon the accepted story that the Scots descended from a young Greek, Gathelus, and Scota, daughter of the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph; and the old story that the Britons were descended from a Trojan named Brutus was a patriotic invention of the English who conquered the Britons. Mr. Arthur Weigall has discovered lately that the lovely Queen of Sheba had hairy legs, that Julius Cæsar was a rather effeminate young man, who waved his hair,

rouged his cheeks and powdered his nose, and that Moses wore a wig. A great deal of our history is written with bias and a special purpose; Henry VIII. was misled over the Princess Anne of Cleves by the report of his Ambassador at the Duke's Court that Holbein had expressed her image "very lively"—a word meaning life-like, no doubt, but its choice suggests that the diplomat would have made a fair historian with a case to prove or support. Macaulay's History is the work of a violent partisan and therefore often unjust and untrue. The Hon. A. S. G. Canning, writing many years ago on history and fiction, compared Macaulay's account of King John, whom he thought altogether a coward and trifler, with Green's view of him as a man of daring confidence who toiled steadily and closely at administration. Mr. Canning attached much greater importance to Shakespeare's delineations of historic characters than modern criticism is prepared to admit, and said that Scott the novelist was often far more judicious and calm in his judgments than Macaulay the historian. Froude is notoriously inaccurate, and his own early ending to a biography contributed by him to Newman's "Lives of the Saints," that he had said all that was known, and indeed a good deal more than was known, about the Blessed St. Neot, might apply to much of his work. Dr. Hunt, in his article on Froude in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," described him as "constitutionally inaccurate"; Freeman attacked him again and again for his inaccuracies of fact and of conclusions in his references to Henry the Eighth and to Becket. When I was writing my novel of the Western Rebellion, I was put on a wrong track altogether by Froude's account, and had to revise my work after checking and comparing him with other writers and especially with Mrs. Frances Rose-Troup's admirable book. And yet, though he did not scruple to distort or suppress facts, and could not copy accurately from the authorities he consulted (he calls, for instance, Robert FitzWalter "Sir Robert

FitzWilliam"), Froude is a delightful writer, did much serious research work, and has made history, in spite of his blunders, a living thing. Freeman himself was not infallible.

Sir Archibald Alison's work is packed with errors, many of them as laughable as school "howlers." Carlyle's pictures of the French Revolutionary leaders, as Dr. Holland Rose said to me recently, cannot all be taken very seriously; his admiration of strength or force led him into violent partisanship; his Oliver Cromwell is no more a true and complete picture of the real man than is Mr. Belloc's. A very able and brilliant writer, Mr. Belloc is hopelessly at sea in his attempts at history when dealing with the Reformation, Cromwell and the Civil Wars, and James the Second—though in the case of James he occasionally comes nearer the truth than many writers in the other camp. There are many topographical and other errors in Carlyle's "Cromwell," contemptuous though he is of his predecessors who have written on the Protector. Gardiner is a careful historian, but there are many errors in his history of the Civil Wars. His map of the Dundee campaign of Montrose is incorrect. He assumes that Montrose left Perth with the intention of engaging Burleigh at Aberdeen, but Wishart says clearly that he did not get news of Burleigh's army until in Angus. The map of the Inverlochy campaign is incorrect. In writing of the Battle of Alford, Gardiner takes Alford for a modern village; his topography here is all wrong.

II

One may find faults in any historian, even in Gibbon; but the historical novelist himself lives in a glass house, and cannot throw very large stones. I think, whatever license may be given to an imaginative writer who takes history as his background, no unnecessary departures from fact should be permitted; the more closely facts are followed

the better is the book. An historical novelist should not play tricks with chronology except when it is absolutely necessary to his plot, and then only in the matter of days or hours, where the historian himself may often be inaccurate or uncertain. He may not alter the great events of history; a novel which made Harold win the Battle of Hastings, or Charles the First cut off the head of Oliver Cromwell, or George IV. fight at Waterloo (though he thought he did), has no right to be called historical. The greatest writers of historical fiction have, as a rule, been careful to keep as closely as possible to history. We have travelled far from the day when Dr. Johnson gave high praise to that dull and stupid historical novel—now probably forgotten—"The Adventures of a Guinea" by Charles Johnson, his namesake, published in 1766. Here we have an English Queen crying out to the hero, after a few words of conversation, "You are the loveliest and sweetest fellow I ever knew. My eye followed you all along, and marked you for my own, and I must either beg or steal you from our good friend your father." Sir Walter Scott once said that absolute antiquarianism and historical accuracy must be foregone, and verisimilitude sought instead; but he had soaked himself with antiquarian and historical knowledge before he began writing novels, and he had the historic sense and a real love for the past. One could, of course, fill a chapter with his errors. In "The Antiquary" he made the sun set in the East. But then Mrs. Radcliffe in one of her books made it set twice in the same day, and Carlyle in "The French Revolution" blunders over Orion and the Pleiades. Astronomy is always a troublesome matter. Stevenson (after a certain error in "Prince Otto") wrote with an almanac near at hand. In "Rob Roy" two horsemen on most urgent business take six days to ride ninety or a hundred miles, yet in the same week ride fifty miles in a day on the same nags. In "Kenilworth" Scott was led astray by an authority he consulted, "Leicester's

Commonwealth," which was concocted against Dudley by his enemies the Jesuits. The interview between Elizabeth and the Countess of Dudley is absolute fiction and could not have taken place. Kenilworth did not belong to Dudley during Amy Robsart's lifetime. She had been dead three years when he obtained possession. Sir Richard Verney (Varney in the novel) seems to have been quite a respectable man, who died years later, and then not of poison. Tony Foster was really a gentleman very highly esteemed, and Dudley was almost certainly guiltless of the murder. Again in " Kenilworth " Scott makes Shakespeare already familiar at Court in the eighteenth year of Elizabeth's reign—when he was actually a small boy. In the early part of " The Antiquary " the dates are badly mixed, and there are two Tuesdays in a week. In " Woodstock " he makes Shakespeare die twenty years too soon; and he is mistaken in his account of the Lees owing to a confusion between two families of that name. In " The Heart of Midlothian," when Effie Deans visits the dairy there is a reference made to Bedreddin Hassan of the Arabian Nights in which are several errors, and Thackeray, in " Vanity Fair," not only copies these by going to Scott instead of to the original, but adds several more. In " Ivanhoe " we find Malvoisin's Christian name given as Richard in one place, and in others as Philip. When Cedric and Athelstan are prisoners together at Torquilstone, Cedric says that in the very hall where they are confined his father feasted with Torquil Wolfganger when he entertained Harold on his advance to meet Tostig. " Oft have I heard my father kindle as he told the tale," he says. But Tostig's revolt was in 1066 and Cedric spoke in 1194, so that if his father had been only twenty when he feasted with Torquil, and Cedric only ten when he heard his father tell his tale, his father must have been ninety-eight when he told it, and eighty-eight when Cedric was born. In one place in " Ivanhoe " Lincolnshire and Leicestershire are confused, and in " Rob Roy " Darlington

and Northallerton are mixed up. "Quentin Durward" contains many blunders. No doubt Scott played tricks with chronology as far as the Bishop of Liège, Louis de Bourbon, was concerned, with intention, and for the purposes of his plot. But the Bishop, whom Scott makes an old man, was a scholar at Louvain of eighteen when he made his entry into his see clad in a scarlet jerkin and with his cap set jauntily on one side—as a boy would. But it was carelessness or ignorance that made Scott in the same book cause Louis XI. to refer to Nostradamus, who was born twenty years after the death of Louis. Tristan L'Hermite is said now to have been a most estimable person.

Charles Dickens in "A Tale of Two Cities" refers to the executioner in one passage as if his name were that of the strong man of the Bible; it was actually Sanson. In "Barnaby Rudge" his account of the hangman's execution is fiction, though another executioner, Price, did actually come to the gallows. Manzoni, in "I Promessi Sposi," was extraordinarily careful about his facts, and one passage about the moon on a certain night has been verified by the calendar; but even he fell into error at the beginning of his book, and left a certain Sunday in 1628 out of his reckonings. Cervantes was, of course, gloriously inaccurate in "Don Quixote," getting Mambrino's barber's-basin helmet broken and whole again time after time, forgetting the stealing of Sancho's ass, and making a hopeless muddle of the adventures of Sancho's coat and wallet. One loves "Don Quixote" no less for that, or for its author's carelessness in making a party sup twice on the same evening. In his fine historical novel "Holmby House" Whyte Melville made an important part of his tale turn on the death of a favourite hawk named Diamond which Mary Cave tossed off so that it fell lifeless at the King's feet in order to attract his notice, and later in the book we find the hawk alive and well. The Iron Mask was in reality a velvet mask. A South African complained recently that a novelist placing

his scenes in that country described a shooting where no game exists, in the close season, and blazing away at *dissel-booms* (wagon shafts), *voetsaks* (a term of contempt), and *nachtmaals* (the quarterly communion service in the Dutch Church). It is not difficult for a novelist writing about a country or a period he does not know to fall into errors almost, if not quite, as absurd. Take Victor Hugo in "L'Homme Qui Rit"—and compare his reign of Anne in that play with "Esmond" by an English writer who, even as a lad, had been familiar with the period which he used to such effect in his novel. Hugo had no knowledge at all of the country or the age he attempted to describe. The historical names were wrongly spelled. And as for his imaginary characters, who ever heard of a Lord Tom Jim Jack, an English pot-boy named Govicum, a prize-fighter named Phelem-ghe-madone, a courtier named Barkel-phedro? He was under the impression that Englishmen addressed the Almighty as "My Lord"; he thought a wapentake was a kind of superior policeman, and the most gloomy of British Kings, James the Second, he described as a jovial monarch. His prize-fight was full of foul blows freely permitted.

One may easily forgive Stevenson for saying, in "Catriona," that Gaelic was still spoken in Fife in the middle of the eighteenth century, and in "The Master of Ballantrae" for making Mrs. Henry thrust a sword up to the hilt in the frozen ground. "One of my inconceivable blunders," he says himself, "an exaggeration to stagger Hugo." But "The Night of February 27th" is one of the finest chapters in all historical fiction; one can never forget that duel in the candle-shine under a black sky with the frosted trees of the shrubbery looking on. Stevenson certainly spared himself no pains in order to make his background accurate. For instance, in writing "The Master" he made careful enquiry as to the name of the Governor of New York in 1764. In "St. Ives," for all his care in detail, he describes

Princes Street and its neighbourhood as it did not appear in 1815. Hugo blunders even in his description of "Notre Dame," with which he was certainly familiar; his "two towers of granite made by Charlemagne" cannot be correct, as no granite was used in the building of the towers, and Charlemagne had nothing to do with the construction. He is as bad as Ariosto, who in "Orlando Furioso" brings Charlemagne and his Paladins into the company of an English King and English nobles unborn in Charlemagne's day. "Quatre-Vingt-Treize" is full of errors and exaggerations, and Hugo's rendering of the Firth of Forth as the First of Fourth, though natural enough, shows the limitations of his knowledge. Unfortunately for himself he claimed that "all the details of erudition are scrupulously exact," and to support this claim, in "Mary Tudor," gave a list of authorities which included Francis Bacon as "Franc Baronum." Both Dumas and Hugo lacked the restraint of Scott, and were apt to be swept into such extravagances as the innkeeper in "Don Quixote" described when referring to Felixmarte of Hyrcania, "Before heaven, your worship should read what I have read concerning Felixmarte of Hyrcania, who with one backstroke cut asunder five giants through the middle, as if they had been so many bean-cods of which children make puppet-friars." At the same time Dumas, except when he deals with English and Scottish history, is far more reliable than is generally supposed; it is amazing how thoroughly he explored the byways of French history; he never shirks detail in his descriptions, and his topography, his costumes, his account of old manners and ways are all quite surprisingly accurate when one considers what an immense field he covered. Those who criticize him too drastically should remember how Bernard Shaw, in his "St. Joan," for which he claims (and to a great extent rightly) verisimilitude and scrupulous adherence to the Middle Ages as they were, is open to criticism quite as severe; though as far as this fine play is

concerned he seems to have escaped it. "You dithering imbecile," "You have the privilege of being the worst, most incompetent, drivelling, snivelling, jabbering idiot of a steward in France," the introduction of words like "Gosh!" and "a blazing ass," and the Squire of Baudricourt's exclamation, "Am I Robert, Squire of Baudricourt and Captain of the castle of Vaucouleurs, or am I a cowboy?" "lassie" and "laddie" which occur here and there in the play, the reproof of Dunois, "You must not dare a staff-officer, Joan; only company officers are allowed to indulge in displays of personal courage," may be defended, no doubt, though they suggest the American film at its worst, the English Wardour Street play, and a modern commentator on the Great War. But what shall we say of Dunois remarking that God is on the side of the big battalions? He may have said it; but the Middle Ages fade away when we find him quoting Napoleon. Nor is the chaplain convincing when he gives his name pompously as "John Bowyer Spenser Neville de Stogumber at your service, my lord," in an age long before a string of names were in fashion. Possibly Mr. Shaw is right, but even in the eighteenth century more than one Christian name was almost unknown.

Hereward, in spite of Kingsley, was never called the Wake, and it has been pointed out by Lieutenant-General Harward in his book on Hereward that Kingsley has really used his hero as "a peg on which to hang a Northamptonshire family named Wake or Jones." But there is this much excuse; John of Peterborough, about the fifteenth century, applied the name "The Wake" to the Saxon patriot. Kingsley's book is chiefly fiction and bears little relation to actual history. A far more accurate novel on Hereward and the last stand of the Saxons against the Norman conquerors is "The Camp of Refuge," by Charles MacFarlane, published anonymously many years ago (the author died in 1858), and reprinted with notes and maps by Samuel Miller, an authority on the history and topo-

graphy of the Fens, in 1880. Frequently, one may remark, the novelist is right and the critic wrong. At a Cutlers' Feast in Sheffield Mr. Baldwin referred some time back to Scott's description of the dress of Gurth, the swineherd, who wore in his belt "one of those long, broad, sharp-pointed and two-edged knives, with a buck's-horn handle, which were fabricated in the neighbourhood, and bore even at this early period the name of a Sheffield whittle." Mr. Baldwin was evidently not quite certain of Scott's accuracy, as he qualified his comment with "Unless Scott was an anachronist," but Scott was absolutely right in his facts. Smelting had begun at Sheffield in Roman times, and is referred to by Chaucer. Anachronism is a gin set in every high-road and footpath travelled by the historical novelist, and those who colour modern stories with references to history. Mr. Selwyn Jepson, a very competent writer, has introduced into his novel "Tiger Dawn" some boxes hidden by an Abbot and the monks to save their treasure from Thomas Cromwell and Henry the Eighth—when they are discovered they disclose English and foreign coins up to the time of Thomas Cromwell! The posters announcing Beerbohm Tree's production of "Julius Cæsar" bore a coin or medallion of Cæsar dated 55 B.C. Stanley Weyman and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle both refer to Devonport in the time of the Regency and the Napoleonic Wars, but the name was unknown until 1824. With the utmost care it is impossible to avoid mistakes, especially as the dictionaries of dates themselves are not always to be relied upon, and the earliest recorded date may be, at any moment, superseded by an earlier. A turkey, for example, slips into a farm-yard a century or two before the bird was known in Europe; a pine-wood is discovered at a date when no pine-wood could have existed in the locality; an old man is unintentionally made young, a young man old; your Latin or French does not accord with its century or place of use; your armour does not belong to its proper period;

you have a rudder on a ship before rudders were invented; your war vessels wear the wrong colours; you kill a man on the battlefield, fighting valiantly to the last—as Lytton killed Warwick in "The Last of the Barons"—when in reality he has fled from the field and died elsewhere.

Setting aside intentional distortions of fact for the sake of the story, one must admit that William de Morgan was right when he said, "Authors do make such frightful blunders! . . . There ought to be a profession of literary men's blunders censor who could be paid by them at so much a blunder detected." But the readers, the great unpaid, do their best to remedy the omission, and personally I am always grateful when a slip is courteously corrected; as I say, the critics themselves are sometimes—though by no means always—wrong.

III

And there are other pitfalls than anachronisms before the historical novelist. Law and medicine present difficulties to the layman, but I am inclined to think that the novelist is often saddled by experts, writing in general terms, with sins of which he is not guilty. Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins, a novelist well qualified to speak both on fiction and on the facts of law, made a sharp rejoinder some years back to a legal attack on the accuracy of novelists. Wherever it is possible an historical novelist will be well-advised to take expert advice about his problems, bearing in mind the fact that even lawyers may err, and that the law of today may not apply to his particular period. George Eliot consulted Frederic Harrison on legal points in "Felix Holt," and he was afterwards accused of being wrong. In writing "Running Horse Inn" I was fortunate enough to have the help of a coroner in Kent, who gave me information about the manner in which inquests were conducted in that county during the Regency, and was also

kind enough to read and comment on my written description before it went to the Press. I learnt a little about legal methods in Tudor and Stuart times by studying manuscripts written by lawyers of those days in which certain cases and processes were described at length.

In the same way it is useful to have a medical man before committing oneself to any description of illness or death. Even then it may be necessary to check his decision by going to the specialist in the form of the medical historian, or by one's own personal research. There is, or was, a theory that sleepy sickness was comparatively recent in this country and even in Europe. But you will find in Stowe an account of a warder in the Tower who suffered from it in the time of Henry the Eighth (1536), and I have been informed by an eminent medical historian that not only was this a genuine case, but that the complaint was common among the French during the fifteenth-century wars in Italy, though other medical men refuse to admit it. Pyorrhea is supposed by many to have been discovered by *The Daily Mail*, but I have seen Saxon skeletons in which traces of it have been found, and a Saxon skull showing signs of syphilis, which the Crusaders are supposed to have introduced to the West. Sir Walter Besant kept note-books recording the symptoms of diseases, and Charles Reade, though he was bitterly attacked, had chapter and verse for his attack on the method of treating the insane in " Hard Cash." Harrison Ainsworth and G. P. R. James generally evaded details, and dealt in a rough-and-ready fashion with illness and death. George Eliot, Thackeray, and Charles Kingsley were careful about their medical facts. Charles Reade was a very careful observer, usually accurate, though he was wrong when he gave a wet-pack for jaundice.

A new school of historical writers has arisen which will probably, in time, affect the methods of the historical novelist, since the ailments of the leading characters in history are made responsible for the development of history

itself. Frederic Chamberlin, the author of an intensely interesting account of Queen Elizabeth's illnesses and their influence on her character and on the history of her reign, is perhaps the leading writer of this school. The opinions of modern doctors of eminence, however, which he gives on the records as set down by doctors of the Tudor period, sound unconsciously a useful note of warning; the moderns vary among themselves as much as their predecessors. Harrison Ainsworth, though he burned Edward Underhill —as he had no right to do—and made Sir Thomas Wyatt lead his men to a valiant attack on the Tower—when as a matter of fact they got no farther than Southwark—was, as I have said before, more painstaking than is generally supposed, and his account of the plague of London is an excellent and accurate piece of work. On the other hand, the illness and death of Mr. Dimmesdale in Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter" must have been a little puzzling to the physician. An Australian doctor, the late Dr. C. MacLaurin, dealt in some very fascinating books with the characters in history and in fiction from a medical standpoint. The Tudors, he thought, were the victims of venereal disease acquired by Henry the Eighth; Joan of Arc suffered from a well-marked repression of sex complex, the Empress Theodora died of cancer, Charles the Fifth ate himself to death, Philip the Second died of arterio-sclerosis, Gibbon from the greatest hydrocele on record, Marat was a paranoic, Ivan the Terrible died of diffuse cerebral syphilis and syphilis of the aortic valve, Henry Fielding of cancer, James the First had adenoids and enlarged tonsils, Charles the Second had chronic Bright's disease, Frederick the Great died of dirt. But here we have a case of experts and doctors differing; Dr. MacLaurin writes of Chamberlin's Elizabeth, "The farrago of somewhat quackish-sounding symptoms that Frederic Chamberlin discovered has no meaning in modern medicine." Referring to "Don Quixote," which he considered better entitled to be called an historical

novel than is generally supposed, Dr. MacLaurin says that Don John of Austria died of ruptured typhoid ulcer in ambulatory typhoid fever, and Don Quixote of hypostatic pneumonia.

Perhaps the historical novelist will be wise not to linger too long over sick-beds and death-beds, or to follow too closely the intricacies of the law. Otherwise he may make as many mistakes as the lawyers and the doctors themselves. But it seems to me important that inaccuracies even in details should be avoided; that history in a novel should be as close to actual fact as the writer, after study of differing authorities, can make it; and that his privilege of altering facts should be exercised as little as possible. It is legitimate to fill in gaps left by history, to introduce imaginary minor characters—which the historian may not do—to interject conversations, to make the smaller dates movable where they are not concerned with outstanding and well-known events. It is not legitimate to alter a date like Waterloo, to paint Queen Bess, without further evidence, as a prunes-and-prisms Victorian miss, to make Napoleon Emperor of Great Britain, to turn Henry the Eighth and Charles the Second into a Moody and Sankey, or to introduce electric heaters into the Roman villa or the Saxon hall. Unless, of course, you are writing historical fiction in the spirit of Mark Twain at his worst, or wish to emulate Sir Archibald Alison's description of Wellington's funeral with Sir Peregrine Pickle as a pall-bearer, or his translation of " timbre " as wood.

XII.—THE READING AND THE WRITING

"Every age must write its own books."—EMERSON.

"Only a few chosen spirits say to the artist: Give me something in any form which may suit you best according to your own temperament."—GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

I

WE will assume, then, that you have happened upon the germ of your book—perhaps no more than the girl seated on a cart-tail which gave Hardy the idea of "Tess"—that you have planned out, tightly or loosely as suits you, the outline, leaving yourself at liberty to depart from it at will, and that you have soaked yourself in your authorities. If you have a very retentive memory it may be worth while to throw away, or put aside, your note-books. Scott, with a well-stored mind resulting from long years of research, achieved greater things than his imitators who crammed themselves, when a book was on the stocks, with facts, and wrote with histories close at hand. There is always a danger then of the novel being over-burdened. Too close an application injured Lytton's books as they injured—to give only one recent instance—those of that very able American novelist, Winston Churchill. A man who has lived all his life in Peckham does not want to turn to a guide-book constantly to find out what Peckham Rye is like, or how its frequenters dress and speak. A writer who has steeped himself in a period for years—as Thackeray steeped himself when at Cambridge in the period of Queen Anne—can write of it without effort.

At the same time a writer who has to deal in different books with different periods and cannot carry everything in

his mind must have constant resort to his notes. Charles Reade could never have written his great historical novel—to read which, as Conan Doyle has said, is like going through the dark ages with a lantern—without his voluminous note-books and scrap-books constantly at hand. Thomas Hardy could not have written his "Dynasts" without constant reference to his note-books.

How to arrange one's notes for easy reference, and have them ready at need for use in their proper place in the story, is one of the minor problems confronting the historical novelist.

I have referred to Walter Pater's elaborate card-system, possibly the earliest mention of the card-index now in such constant use. This method seems worth consideration, but I have never succeeded in making use of it myself. My own method, if I may refer to it in the possibility that young historical novelists may derive some hints from it, is the result of several experiments and I find it fairly satisfactory.

First of all I jot down in cheap note-books extracts or abstracts from innumerable books and documents, without any arrangement at all. Cuttings, and notes scribbled on loose scraps of paper at odd times when an idea strikes me, go into envelopes. The time comes when I think I have read enough for my immediate purpose, and have collected sufficient material for my book.

I have now, perhaps, half a dozen or more note-books packed with miscellaneous matter bearing on my period and my characters; several large envelopes crammed with cuttings and loose notes; a number of maps, portraits, photographs of places, and guide-books.

The next step is to purchase a large manuscript book on good paper, and in board covers, divided into lettered sections. I set to work to transfer the more important of my notes into this—a laborious process, but one which assists easy reference at need. Into this book I paste cuttings, and insert loose matter under its proper heading. But as an

example let me refer to the indexed book finally used in the writing of my book " Queen Dick."

In the unlettered pages at the beginning are lists of authorities:

" Noble. Oliver C. and Sons (no author's name) 1820. Waylen's House of Cromwell. 1880. Guizot's R. Cromwell. 1856. Carlyle. Calendar of State Papers. Thurloe's State Papers. . . . Genealogists' Guide Ed. 2 for descendants of Richard. Theobalds (Greater London, Walford) Numismata Cromwelliana. Master Clarke (Play in which Macready appeared) Statutes and Ordinances of Long Parliament. Pamphlet published by E. Curll in 1733. Some Private Passages of the Life of Sir Thomas Pengelly, written by a lady of 80. . . . London Mag. 1744 (date of Richard C.'s return to England). . . . Dr. Calamy on Howe. Balleie (Letters) . . . Luke's Letter Books (Stowe MSS. 785/7) Richard Symonds (Essex man) in War-Diary, B. Museum."

And so on.

In the unlettered pages at the end I have jotted down the dates covered by my novel, beginning with 1626, the year of Richard Cromwell's birth, and ending with 1712, that of his death. Each decade has its space for brief notes on the leading incidents of the years.

And here are the headings of entries under one letter, " F," some entries being of only two or three lines, some of several closely written pages; in the headings themselves I have not troubled about the alphabetical order of any but the first letter:

" Felsted.
Fairfax, Lord.
Fauconberg, Thomas Viscount.
Fens, The.
Fleetwood, Charles.
Frances, the Lady (Cromwell).
Food.
Funerals.
French, Dr. Peter.

Fiennes, Lord Nathaniel (son of Lord Saye and Sele).
France in 1680.
Ferrar, Nicholas.
Falkland, Lord."

This indexed book is my chief stand-by when actually writing, but I refer constantly to other entries in the original note-books as they assume an importance not at first realized; to maps and views and portraits; and frequently to printed books for additional knowledge. When the book is finished I turn back to many of my authorities to verify important facts.

Here is a very brief note under " D " which will give some idea of the entries; not all of them, of course, were finally used:

" Dives, Sir Lewis. Half-brother to Lord Bristol. Tale of escape from Tower—in winter from six musketeers. Leapt into Thames, swam to waiting boat, travelled as woman and small coalman for 200 miles (romancer !)

A poor method, perhaps, and one not to be imitated—but nevertheless my own.

II

Volumes have been written about style, but I think many of these may be summed up in a saying of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, himself a distinguished writer of historical novels and tales, that style, after all, is good manners. Beyond giving this hint, it seems impossible to lay down many hard-and-fast rules. The reader of fiction and even, in most cases, the critic of fiction nowadays seem to care very little whether a book is written well or ill. On the whole the historical novel of any merit is probably better written today than in the years when Scott and his early imitators flourished; it is curious that it should be so, because the eighteenth century, to which they were so near, took immense pains with even a homely letter. I have one in my possession

written by an ancestor, the Warwickshire parson-poet, Richard Jago (Shenstone's friend), who in his poem "Edge-hill" invented the Peeping Tom of the Coventry legend. This letter, to a newly married daughter, my great-great-grandmother, is on good paper, gilt-edged, and is most elegantly and beautifully penned; it is full of the most delightful humour and wise, humorous advice set in careful sentences and words. Scott wrote in too much haste to be very careful, but in his great scenes he succeeds in being very effective. Lytton was frequently heavy and dull, often gushing, and overburdened by knowledge which he insisted on conveying to the reader at all costs. "The Cloister and the Hearth" would be an even finer book than it is if Reade had not been essentially a dramatist rather than a novelist; he has some of the tricks of Lawrence Sterne without his subtle art of blending and concealment—and what suited "Tristram Shandy" admirably is less in keeping with Reade's great novel of an earlier age. When Gerard is refused admission to the Stadthouse at Rotterdam his shout is put in capitals for emphasis: "HO! PHILIP, EARL OF HOLLAND!" We may forgive and even welcome the introduction of a stave of music; it is very effective in the love scene between Gerard and Margaret which ends—

"And the sun declined and the air cooled and the fountain plashed more gently and the pair throbbed in unison and silence and the weary world looked heaven to them.

Oh the merry days, the merry days when we were young,
Oh the merry days, the merry days when we were young!"

But Joseph Conrad, without bringing in the aid of another Muse, conveys even better the wistful realization of lost youth in the ending of his marvellous little story "Youth":

"'Wasn't that the best time when we were young, and had nothing, on the sea that gives nothing, except hard knocks—and sometimes a chance to feel your strength?'

" And we all nodded at him ; the man of finance, the man of accounts, the man of law, we all nodded at him over the polished table that like a still sheet of brown water reflected our faces, lined, wrinkled ; our faces marked by toil, by deceptions, by success, by love ; our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone—has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash—together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of an illusion."

That is magnificent ; and not less so because it was written by a Pole writing in an alien tongue.

Reade ends a chapter " And then——" in the fashion of a serial writer for the popular press anxious to bring in next day's or next week's penny. He refers, by the way, in one passage to couples walking hand in hand, and continues, " for strange as it may appear to my readers, the use of the elbow to couples walking out was not discovered in Europe till centuries after this " ; a novelist should never instruct his readers so obviously. The message brought to Gerard in the tower by the arrow is printed in old English type for effect. He shows the dramatist here and there by putting his narrative into dramatic dialogue :

MARGARET (*paling*) : " Why it is a woman !"
KATE (*quivering*) : " Why it is a woman !"

Again, we have

" PARCHMENT ! PARCHMENT ! PARCHMENT !"

and (in larger capitals still)

" GONE ! GONE ! GONE !"

Sometimes his capitals are used to mark the raising of a voice ; sometimes for emphasis to soft speech when there was no shouting at all. Thus " Denys said in a sickening whisper :

" ' THE CUB !' "

He should not, of course, have shouted in a sickening whisper. Charles Reade wrote in " The Cloister and the Hearth "

one of the greatest historical novels we have; but "we authors" (I think this was how Lord Beaconsfield wrote to Queen Victoria) should avoid too much underlining of this nature, and achieve our effects as far as possible without topographical gymnastics. While I am writing of this fine book I may just mention the curious use in chap. lxv. made by Reade of a passage in "Benvenuto Cellini's Memoirs," recently pointed out to me by my friend Mr. Roderick Macleod; I do not know if it has been previously discovered and commented upon. Reade makes a certain Pietro Vanucci, when Gerard is living his wild life in Rome, organize a water-party on the Tiber in a boat drawn by buffaloes, which had been introduced by Lorenzo de Medici into Florence three years before the date of the story. Each libertine had to bring a lady, who must be beautiful, under the penalty of a fine exacted from her escort. The one bringing the loveliest companion was to be crowned with laurel and voted a public benefactor.

All were ready for the start in the splendid galley, drawn by twelve buffaloes driven along the towing-path; Gerard himself was late. At last he was seen in the distance with a female "in his hand" (*sic*). She was a peerless beauty, tall, but not too tall, straight as a dart, but supple as a panther. Her face was a perfect oval, she had glorious eyes and silken eyelashes, saucy red lips and teeth of whitest ivory. One of the gay party while goading the buffaloes was tossed by an old bull into Tiber. The ladies screamed—except Gerard's, who, with something like an oath, seized the helm and steered the boat while the gallant caught the gunwale. She was very witty, and by and by the other ladies, stung to jealousy, began to criticize her sharply, whereupon she retorted by taunting them on the paint with which it had been necessary for them to add to their charms. Suddenly a girl threw her some almonds which she caught by drawing her knees together. "Ah, you are caught, my lad," cried the thrower, "a woman parteth her knees to

catch the nuts the surer in her apron; a man closeth his for fear they should fall between his hose."

Pietro Vanucci, the organizer of the party, turned on the laughers and reminded them how they had laughed him to scorn a little while before by saying that, in a true artist's eyes, a man is as beautiful as a woman. Gerard's lady was Vanucci's boy Andrea, a youth of rare beauty who ground his master's paints and acted as his model and pupil, and Gerard and Vanucci had concocted the joke between them.

And now turn to that picturesque rascal Benvenuto Cellini in chap. xxx. of his published "Autobiography." Michael Angelo, he tells us, had founded a club in Rome for painters, sculptors, and goldsmiths. Each artist had to bring a female companion to the club meetings, and these women were called the artists' "Crows." Cellini was friendly with a young lady of considerable beauty and very much in love with him, but he gave her up to one of his dearest friends who loved her madly. Deprived of his companion, and not wishing to take a scare-crow in her place, Cellini "devised a pleasant trick." Next door to him lived a Spanish coppersmith who had a son of sixteen, a very handsome boy named Diego, with a marvellous complexion, and a head more beautiful than that of Antinous. Cellini had employed this lad as a model. He had him clad in woman's clothes, with his hair carefully dressed, having two little rings in it each set with a fair, large pearl; put rings on his fingers and a chain round his neck; and introduced him thus disguised at the club. Michael Angelo and his friends greeted the visitor with enthusiasm, and the boy proved as witty and as clever as he was beautiful, joining with vivacity in the conversation, and reading a sonnet very gracefully to the admiration of those present. A painter present said that the nickname of crow very well suited the ladies of the day; they were even less fair than crows beside one of the most lovely peacocks fancy could have painted. At the banquet that followed "Pomona," as the lad was dubbed,

sang better than anyone else, but eventually the fraud was discovered.

This is an aside, and I am not suggesting that Reade was unjustified in using in fiction what Benvenuto had set down as historical fact. But I cannot help feeling that "The Cloister and the Hearth" is marred by its author's theatricalities, and that the good manners which should be synonymous with style in fiction are occasionally departed from. His novel is weaker rather than stronger owing to his attempts to emphasize.

Mr. W. E. Williams in "The Craft of Literature" has a useful passage; he says: "Each great writer brings to his work, first and foremost, a personality that stamps his books with a private seal, that makes them in one way or another different from other men's books." Stevenson took immense pains over the actual writing in his books, searching diligently—sometimes almost too diligently—for the exact word which, as Flaubert said, exists somewhere if it can be found; as a result he is occasionally artificial. But he himself shows through the framework as a light through the horn or glass of a lantern. He had been "sedulous ape" to earlier great writers, but when one reads him one touches, not Browne or Hazlitt, not Scott or De Quincey or any of his models, but the personality of an eager writer with something to say for himself and show of himself. "Our talents cannot be taught," said that great actress Eleanora Duse; "if one has not 'God under one's skin,' as the poet said, nothing can be done." In his earlier work Quiller-Couch imitated too closely, perhaps, Stevenson and Dickens. But he had personality of his own to express and his (much finer) later work, especially his best novel, "Hetty Wesley," shows few traces of the early influences. A writer must learn something of his craft from others as a child must have pencilled lines and models before he can learn to write unaided. I think it is very useful to a young writer anxious to succeed in this difficult matter of historical fiction to read

and study the writings of the masters of his craft, and to read and study our best craftsmen in other fields of literature. He will learn a great deal from the way in which early folk-tales have been told ; the forms of the nursery-tales and fairy-tales have been almost stereotyped, and are sometimes models of compression and effectiveness. He will find the Bible invaluable, and I cannot help feeling that, apart from theology and ethics altogether, our Authorized version is insufficiently studied today ; it is impossible to overestimate its influence on our literature in the past. I remember the case of a village maid-servant in Surrey who wrote the most exquisite simple prose, and her reading had been confined entirely to the Bible and the " Pilgrim's Progress." No stories have ever been better told than those of Joseph, of Esther, or Ruth, of the birth of Jesus Christ. Thomas Hardy (but I am not sure that he is right) thought that there was evidence of deliberate art in the Biblical narratives ; he said that they were written with a watchful attention—though disguised—as to their effect on their readers. Their so-called simplicity he considered the simplicity of the highest cunning. In the first novel he wrote Hardy imitated the manner of Defoe, who also served as a model to Stevenson when he was teaching himself to write. Few authors better repay study than the author of " Robinson Crusoe," " Moll Flanders," " The Journal of the Plague Year," " Mrs. Veal," and that quite able historical novel, " The Memoirs of a Cavalier." Scott analyzed " The Apparition of Mrs. Veal," and an understanding of the way in which Defoe, the most ingenious and accomplished liar in all literature, achieves verisimilitude is sufficient equipment for the whole staff of any modern School of Fiction. A Scottish advocate was once talking matters over with his client :

ADVOCATE : " Is that all ?"

CLIENT : " Ou ay, mon ; ye maun put the lees till't yoursel'."

Defoe would have put in "the lees" so convincingly as to satisfy the most exacting client. He is most ingenious in keeping himself out of sight—and here also is a useful lesson, because so many good historical novels have been spoilt by the intrusion of their authors. Defoe, in "Mrs. Veal," invents a J.P. at Maidstone to give an air of truth to his story; a very sober and understanding gentlewoman attests it, he invents a neighbour to be her authority, invents someone else to contradict this neighbour—but he has the reputation of being a liar, and the neighbour he contradicts has no object in telling lies. It is all very ingenious, very plausible, very convincing. Sir Walter Raleigh (the second) says that Defoe fully appreciated the argument in favour of an apparition which may be drawn from the folly of its behaviour. He knew better, in short, than to make a ghost too reasonable.

Verisimilitude is more important to an historical novelist than truth itself. I strongly believe that the fewer liberties taken with history the better, and that the important facts of background and even of detail should never be needlessly tampered with. But above all it is necessary to make the story *seem* true. If fact itself appears improbable, it must be made probable, or be discarded. Let me illustrate this by two instances, the first from the poet Thomson, the second from my own experience.

In "The Seasons" Thomson describes the Dorsetshire Downs. He describes them as "there rich with harvest, and there red with sheep." The image jars for a moment on the mind until it is explained; why not "white with sheep" except for the useful alliteration? Thomson was perfectly right; the sheep on the Dorset Downs *were* red, having been washed with red ochre. A novelist would be well advised, as Hardy does, to explain this, because the mental image suggested when sheep on downs are mentioned is that they must obviously be white.

Years ago I was asked by a friend to read and criticize

a short story written by a boy who was anxious to take up literature as a career. He began with a description of a drawing-room in the suburbs of London; on a rug before the fire lay a tiger. The tiger played no part at all in the story after the brief first mention; possibly the youthful writer had been recently to the Zoo, and had thought that the introduction of some wild beast would add to the interest. But it seemed to me that however admirable tigers burning bright in the forests of the night may be, or even in the Zoological Gardens, one had no right to do his burning before a suburban fire. I turned the tiger out, suggesting some large dog instead. Not long after I was walking in a London suburb with an acquaintance. "Do you know," she said, "I kept a young tiger as a pet once? He was sent to me from India and we had him quite a long time. He was great friends with a huge boarhound we had; the two used to roll up and down the stairs together, and lie together before the fire. But one day he went to the door and put through his head (in young tigers hugely out of proportion to the body) just as the butcher's boy was coming up with his tray. Down was flung the tray, away bolted the boy in terror; and it was decided that the time had come to send my pet away into captivity." And yet I was right in my criticism; the story lacked the appearance of truth.

And, while I am referring to this lad's story, let me point out another of its defects and illustrate this by another experience of my own. His tiger was introduced, and played no further part in the tale. When I was a small boy I spent some years in a school to which I look back with considerable gratitude; it was conducted on lines somewhat similar to those of a famous school founded by Sir Rowland Hill and his brother which earned, many years ago, the approval of many eminent men of the day, and was even imitated on the Continent. The boys governed themselves to a large extent, as the school was modelled as far as possible on the constitution of this country; it had its Parliament of

boys, its Prime Minister and Cabinet, its elections and political crises. I shall refer to it again when I touch on the historical novel and education. Occasionally we had to write short stories for criticism by one of the masters, and a story I wrote earned very high praise from him and afterwards from the Head. But my next effort brought a most disconcerting rebuff and reproof. We had been told to make a vivid story out of the well-known incident of the tailor who pricked the trunk of an elephant, and was punished by being drenched with water when the elephant passed his shop again. I had taken a good deal of pains to make my story picturesque; with buildings of fretted ivory and gold, with the various characters in the bazaar and its coloured medley of earthenware, metal-work, draperies, gourds; the water-carriers, the turbans like a garden of tulips—and then the elephant lumbering past and stopping at the open shop. I began, I remember, with a description of the tailor's open shop and of his family, and his shrill-voiced wife in a gay silk dress she had been given recently—a small boy's imaginary conception, in short, of the East. And then, to my dismay, the story in which I took so much pride was handed back as "very bad."

"What on earth do you make so much of the tailor's wife and her dress for if you are not going to make use of them in your tale?" I was asked sternly. "We hear no more of them. At the very least the elephant, when he took his revenge, should have squirted the water over the dress and heightened the effect by spoiling it and bringing down the wife's anger on her husband to add to his discomfiture."

That was, I think, the most useful lesson I have had in the art of fiction, and I have remembered it all these years even if I have not always been successful in applying it. The more a story is helped along by each character, each episode, each fragment of dialogue, each detail of description, the more satisfactory it is likely to be, I think, from the point of view of art. Near the beginning of "Running Horse

Inn " there is a brief reference to George Kennett, a soldier returned from the Peninsula who is one of the chief characters, kicking a cat across an inn-yard, and being reproved for his brutality. His sister-in-law, Bess Kennett, with whom he is in love, has been scratched by the cat while trying to save it from a dog :

" George dragged the dog back by the collar, and, as the cat slunk past him, kicked it savagely across the yard.

" ' Oh, George,' cried Bess, ' you shouldn't have kicked it like that ! Poor thing ! Is it hurt ?'

" ' Hurt ? No thanks to him if it ain't dead,' said the maid from the Ship vindictively, glaring at George, and embracing the fat, torpid body of her pet. ' Nasty savage way to treat a poor dumb animal !'

" ' 'Bout as dumb as you, I reckon, your cat is,' said George. ' Has it hurt you, Bess ? Let's look !'

" ' No, it's nothing much,' said Bess, rather shortly."

George Kennett, as the novel goes on to show, has been changed and made callous by Badajoz and the cruelties of war. My typescript was read by my then Agent, the late Mr. C. F. Cazenove—and an excellent Agent and good friend he was, whose too early death was much regretted by all who knew him. He suggested that it would be as well to give a hint as to the strain of cruelty in George (who, nevertheless, at the end of the book, dies nobly at Penenden Heath) by the introduction of some slight episode, and I wrote in the passage I have just quoted with that object. But it seems to me legitimate to use detail and characters having no direct bearing on the advancement of the plot, and even dialogue having no direct bearing on its advancement, in order to convey atmosphere. You cannot take people into the Middle Ages, for instance, or the days of the Tudors, without creating an illusion. In life individuals are not linked together in their interests as are the characters who perished on the Bridge of San Luis Rey in Thornton Wilder's brilliant novel. It may be necessary to show an age, against

the background of which your central characters are to live and move, by introducing a number of typical figures whose presence may not necessarily be concerned with the plot itself.

Scott was impatient of the archaic style of Strutt, whose book he completed; writing at a time when the novel was not taken very seriously, he said that every work designed for amusement must be expressed in language easily comprehended. That is certainly one of the first objects the historical novelist has to bear in mind. Many a good book has been spoilt by difficult archaisms unfamiliar to the reader, whose ignorance is not suspected by a writer fresh from close study of his period. If you say without explanation that a great Tudor family has gone away to sweeten, your reader will naturally be puzzled if he does not happen to know already that, when Tudor houses grew too unpleasant for habitation, the family would move to another. If you are concerned with legal actions and mention fines and recoveries, he will probably be unaware of the lengthy fictitious actions of a past age connected with the transfer of property. If you find someone calling someone else, as I did recently in an historical novel, a "sely hilding," the term may be right enough—I think it is in the "Paston Letters"—but it may puzzle a reader for a moment, interrupt the even flow of the story, and give an air of artificiality by the sharpness of contrast. In the same novel, quite a good novel by the way, we read of "a sky full of sterres." Unless all is to be written in the actual language and go-as-you-please spelling of a pre-Johnsonian age, why "sterres"? A "clear night of stars" was good enough for Stevenson, meticulous and precious as he sometimes was. Trollope, writing of "Ivanhoe," said that if he were to attempt Richard Cœur de Lion and his days in a book, he would no doubt be tempted to essay some far-away quaintness of language. That is legitimate enough, but it must not destroy the reader's illusion that he is himself living among actual men and women; he must not have to

wonder constantly what they mean, and their thoughts and actions, however different from those of today, must be convincing; the story must *seem* true.

In "The Old Country" Aubrey Earnshaw was always laughing about what the old furniture dealers call "ye quaint mediæval style."

Laverock, the artist, says, "But surely in the Middle Ages they *were* mediæval?"

"They were not mediæval; they were alive," was the retort, which every writer dealing with bygone times in his books would do well to remember.

III

The Wardour Street novel has had its use, but I do not think that today, when so many good historical novels are written—and so many neglected and forgotten—it has still its excuses. Here the best and the better should be the enemy of the mere "tushery," however much Stevenson enjoyed the writing of the tushery of—part of—his "Black Arrow." In the case of furniture there is no object in buying reproductions inferior to good contemporary work if one can obtain the latter at an equal price.

Let anyone anxious to write well, and to write a good historical novel rather than an indifferent one, find out and study the best models. I do not propose to furnish a long list of names to which beginners may play the sedulous ape as Stevenson played it to Hazlitt, Browne, Hawthorne, Dumas, and the rest. I will simply suggest that the *best* should be studied, and that in descriptions, in dialogue, in character-drawing, in the writing of particular scenes and episodes, a careful and critical comparison should be made of the methods of our greatest writers. Do you want to depict the gruesome, the awe-inspiring, the horrible? Go beyond Horace Walpole, beyond Mrs. Radcliffe, who was better than Walpole, even if her aim at explanation defeated

its object now and then, as in the case of the waxen figure which disappointed so many expectant readers. Hawthorne will teach you something; Edgar Allen Poe—but his prose is much inferior to some of his verse, and one of his most famous stories of terror and horror, the "Pit and the Pendulum" is, I fancy, merely a réchauffé in a different environment and form of a scene in the historical novelist Charles Brockden Brown's story (probably read by Poe in boyhood) "Edgar Huntly." Here we have a man caught in a pit the sides of which it is impossible to scale:—"Was it not possible, I asked, to reach the top of this pit?"—he begins to experience the horror of hunger—"Even amid the agonies of that period the human nature required food"—he sees the eyes of a panther glowing out of darkness. . . . I believe Brown is scientifically wrong in his description, but that is a small matter. . . . Kipling has used a somewhat similar predicament. In tales of terror and the imagination you need not go farther for models than to Rudyard Kipling, to H. G. Wells in his "Island of Dr. Moreau," to W. W. Jacobs in "The Monkey's Paw," and one or two of his other stories, and to Stevenson. Mark Twain, also, is sufficiently grim and convincing in his short story of the Swiss mortuary and its keeper's revenge on an old enemy.

For descriptions of scenery you may study, among innumerable others, Hardy, Phillpotts, Meredith—look, for example, at the beginning of "Vittoria." Merezhkowski's "Forerunner" opens with a very effective description of a corner of Florence, which is indicative of the intimate study of the city's life you will find throughout this glorious book. "In Florence" runs the opening paragraph, "the guild of dyers had their shops hard by the Canonica of Orsanmichele. The houses were disfigured by every sort of shed, outhouse, and projection on crooked wooden supports; tiled roofs leaned so close to each other as almost to shut out the sky, and the street was dark even in the glare of noon. In the doorways below, samples of foreign woollen-stuffs were

suspended, sent to Florence to be dyed with litmus-lichen, with madder, or with woad steeped in a corrosive of Tuscan alum. The street was paved roughly, and in the kennel flowed many-coloured streams, oozings from the dye vats. Shields over the portals of the principal shops, or *Fondachi*, were blazoned with the arms of the Calimala (so the guild of dyers were named), on a field gules, an eagle or, upon a ball of wool argent."

This is, of course, a translation, but an admirable translation. "The Forerunner" is a novel every historical novelist will do well to study.

It is more difficult to find models, among historical novels at all events, for scenes where love enters; not that they are in any sense rare, but here some of the greatest authors find a stumbling-block. I will refer to this again briefly later on.

> "The chemist of love
> Will this perishing mould
> Were it made out of mire
> Transmute into gold,"

was, alas, not written of the majority; there are a few chemists of love among the masters, but here many even of the masters fail. At fighting, duelling, stirring incident and adventure they are better, and it is easier to find a good description of nature, of domestic life, of the aspect of a city or the interior of cottage or palace, than a really satisfactory love scene. If you want a description of a storm, go to "The Pirate." French literature will show you in Théophile Gautier's "Capitaine Fracasse"—his "Bohemian fairy-tale" as it has been called, of the strolling players in the days of Louis XIII.—how a great novelist has succeeded in conveying the impression of vanished glory and desolation; the description of the Château de la Misère will well repay study. I fancy Stevenson must have studied it before writing "The Treasure of Franchard." And, by the way, the burial of the old cat Beelzebub in the garden and the finding of the

treasure in "Capitaine Fracasse" show how a skilful writer may make use of the most unpromising material as machinery. Although it is not an historical novel, a young writer may learn a great deal from Henry Harland's delightful and ingenious story "The Cardinal's Snuff-box," and in "St. Peter's Umbrella," by the Hungarian novelist Koloman Mikszáth, the plot turns on an umbrella which in the end brings lovers together. In Mr. Mottram's "Our Mr. Dormer," a portrait connects different generations. Sigrid Undset's great historical novel—great in more senses than one—"Kristin Lansvandatter"—of Norway in the fourteenth century, is very successful in its pictures of interiors, and here we do have an equally successful love story in that of Kristin and Erland. There are many scenes in "Esmond" which will repay study, for instance the scene where Madam Esmond defies the mob. Lytton is not a particularly good model; he has to some extent Reade's trick of theatricality and is fond of dots and dashes, in addition to other demerits of which Reade is guiltless. I think it is Lubbock in his "Craft of Fiction"—by the way, a very useful book—who says that a book must seem true; and that this cannot be achieved by simple statement. Ford Madox Hueffer (Ford Madox Ford) has said very truly that it is the business of the historical novelist to make his readers think they are actually living in the days and among the people described. He certainly has succeeded in doing this in his own historical novels, and in doing it without strain or apparent effort. That once very popular book, "The Princess of Cleves," by Madame de la Fayette, is full of love and passion and in its day was taken as model by Madame de Fontaines and many others—it is a story of the last days of Henri II. of France, and the Princess, married to a husband she respects rather than loves, rebuffs the Duc de Nemours who is madly in love with her; but it is all described at such length and in such stilted language that the modern writer, I think, will not be greatly helped

by it. As Emerson has said, every age must write its own books; one may say also that every writer must write his own books, and one can lay down no very hard-and-fast rules. Maurice Hewlett, for instance, seems to me a much greater writer than is perhaps realized or admitted, but his style was his own, and was certainly not always distinguished by simplicity. I can read "The Forest Lovers," "Richard Yea-and-Nay," "The Queen's Quhair," and "Little Novels of Italy" (the Canterbury series of tales seem to me less admirable) with enjoyment, but an imitation of his style by other writers leaves me cold, or irritated. Miss Carola Oman wrote an excellent novel not long back entitled "Crouchback." Without discussing her re-dishing of old libels on Richard III. who was certainly less black than he has been painted, even if I am not sure that he was as white as Miss Bowen has painted him in "Dickon," I found the enjoyment of her book interrupted now and then by phrases evidently modelled on Hewlett. Take such passages as "Now take heed what love may do, for love is a great master that will not be cast out even by haut earls and kings," "It must be said of him that he faced them like a man," "Was he happy? He had reason to be," "Was the Duchess happy? Her husband spares no trouble to make her so," "Rest assured that (the Duchess) made the Duke good cheer," "Was he happy? Ah, have no fear," "Where had Berry, the lily maid, learnt this lore of love and unlove? Rest tranquil. It was from her mother, Dame Elizabeth," "Judge if speech of that kind revived confidence." . . . They seem to me pure Hewlett.

Maurice Hewlett is eminently a writer to read, but not, I think, a writer to copy in his mannerisms, though one may enjoy them in his own work. Speaking generally, the simplest style is often far more effective than the studied and elaborated. One of the best examples of style I ever came across was a letter from a sailor in the days of Nelson to his mother. It was written in the simplest English, direct and

sometimes naïve in its descriptions; but his account of Nelson's death, and how the strongest and roughest fellows on board the *Victory* broke down, and became "as soft as toads," and sobbed their eyes out, sticks in my memory, though it is many years since I read it.

XIII.—"A NUMBER OF THINGS"

"I believe that all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite."—VIRGINIA WOOLF.

"It is a miserable thing, after one hath raised the expectation of the company by humorous characters and pretty conceits, to pursue the matter too far. There is no retreating, and how poor it is for a story-teller to end his relation by saying 'That's all!'"—SIR RICHARD STEELE.

I

THIRTEEN is apparently an unlucky number for titles; I cannot put all I want to say in this chapter under one cap. Like Stevenson's child-world, the actual writing of a novel is "so full of a number of things." Let me, going as I please, begin with beginnings.

It has been said by an historical novelist that the beginning of a book is the hardest part. I do not agree with this; my own experience is that the one difficulty about a beginning is selection. The hardest part comes not at the start, not at the end, but at a certain point in the course of the story when a blank wall seems to have been reached; when it may appear necessary, or even be necessary, to retrace one's steps; when the plot, however roughly it may have been mapped out, begins to entangle itself in unsuspected difficulties; when one fears that the chief aim of any novel, to interest the reader, is being missed. I have sometimes reached the middle of a book and then re-cast it altogether, and re-written the greater part.

Often the way a book should start suggests itself long before the preparatory work has been finished.

I propose to quote here a few openings to historical novels which seem to me happy openings, and incidentally they

will serve as instances of the many styles in which novels of this class have been written by competent authors. First of all I will turn your attention for a moment to the beginning of Mary Coleridge's novel of the days of Gustavus III. I do not know any finer opening than that of "The King with Two Faces." Chapter i. is very short—only four pages, chiefly in brief dialogue; it is headed "In Which the Hero is Expected":

"Four horses, saddled and bridled, stood ready.

"Four loaded pistols lay on the table.

"A. had a book in his hand, but he was not reading.

"B. was writing a letter, but the regular scratching of his pen had ceased some time before.

"C., with his hands in his pockets, was trying to sit listlessly before the fire, but he was not sitting listlessly.

"D. had thrown himself on the sofa and closed his eyes, but he was not asleep.

"Very lightly and slightly, apologetically, as it were, because his ears were tired of long listening with nothing to listen to, B. began to whistle a tune from *Thetis and Peleus*.

"'Be quiet, cannot you?' D. said angrily.

"And B. took up his pen again, while the speaker shut his eyes in the resolute manner of a person who *will* not remain awake.

"The slow ticking of the clock seemed to each one of them like the beating of a hammer on a bare nerve."

The four men, thus described, are waiting until the stroke of eleven, when a visitor is expected—the young Count Ribbing, bearer of a message to the King; and to silence him they have determined on his assassination. They hear the sound of hoofs.

"'There he is!'

"The last words were spoken as quietly as all the rest.

"The three accomplices sprang forward.

"'Be seated, gentlemen!' he said, in a tone which had the effect of physical force. 'Let that groom open the door. Do you not see that, if one of us went out to meet him, he might hand in the letter without dismounting? It is our

object to decoy him into this room. When he enters, bow to him, but take no further notice. The shutters are bolted. While I am speaking, C. will lock the door and secure the key. I shall try to get him into the garden. If it can be done there, so much the better. If not, the business must be finished here. Remember that no one sees whose shot it is which takes effect. Have you your weapons? Good! When you hear me say *The King*, fire!'

" In a second the pistols had vanished from the table.

" D. was asleep upon the sofa.

" B. was writing as if he were writing for a wager.

" C. sat before the fire, the picture of indolent reverie.

" The galloping hoofs came nearer, the sound grew louder and louder, and stopped short suddenly just outside. There was a thundering knock on the door."

This passage (which has in it just a hint of a famous scene in " Quentin Durward ") ends the first chapter; in the second the hero appears, and extricates himself by working on the superstitious fears of his chief adversary, again much as the astrologer escaped from Louis XI. But it is an original and masterly beginning to an original and masterly book. Study this opening carefully and you will find that it fulfils several of the conditions laid down by Guy de Maupassant for a successful story. " The public," he says, " is composed of several groups whose cry to us writers is:

" ' Comfort me.'
" ' Amuse me.'
" ' Touch me.'
" ' Make me dream.'
" ' Make me laugh.'
" ' Make me shudder.'
" ' Make me weep.'
" ' Make me think.' "

In the first three chapters, of about eleven printed pages in all, we are puzzled and made to think by the waiting group, touched and made to shudder at the doom prepared and so nearly executed on the gallant and honourable young rider, amused by his ruse and comforted at his escape; we laugh

with him when he rides out free and shouts defiantly " Vive le Roi !" And in the first few lines of the book we have a lesson in one of the first elements of successful fiction; we are held in suspense, and kept on tenter-hooks to know what comes next.

Another good opening is that of Stanley Weyman's " Under the Red Robe " :

" ' Marked cards !'

" There was a score round us when the fool, little knowing the man with whom he had to deal, and, as little how to lose like a gentleman, flung the words in my teeth."

Weyman is usually happy in his openings. One of his best novels, " The Castle Inn," borrows an idea from the opening of " A Tale of Two Cities " which again has been copied more recently by semi-historical writers of the Strachey school. It has never been better done than by Dickens, whose early chapters of this novel, whatever the book's later demerits may be, are altogether admirable:

" It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity . . . we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

" There was a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face on the throne of England; there were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face on the throne of France. In both countries it was clearer than crystal to the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes that things in general were settled for ever."

Things were *not* settled for ever in this year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five; and this Dickens wished to emphasize at his opening chapter. Yet I am not sure that he would not have made an even better

beginning with the beginning of the second chapter: " It was the Dover road that lay, on a Friday night late in November, before the first of the persons with whom this history has business "—and then worked the changes of the time into his narrative, possibly in dialogue between passengers, as Maupassant does in " Boule de Suif." The early chapters, beginning with chap. ii., " The Mail," seem to me as admirable in their sense of atmosphere as the opening chapters of " Great Expectations," in which I have always thought Charles Dickens reaches his high-water mark. In " The Castle Inn " Weyman begins by referring to " about a hundred and thirty years back "—it was, by the way, a mistake to number the years from that in which he was writing—" when the third George, whom our grandfathers know in his blind dotage, was a young and sturdy bridegroom," and when various other things to which he refers were matters of interest; he goes on to say that a travelling chariot and four drew up about five in the evening before the inn at Wheatley Bridge, a short stage from Oxford on the Oxford Road. We are ready now for the adventures.

Scott's happiest beginning seems to me that of " Kenilworth." " It is the privilege of tale-tellers," are his commencing words, " to open their story in an inn," and we are at once listening to the conversation between Giles Gosling and his nephew at the Black Bear at Cumnor. Giles, with his round belly, cellar of sound liquor, ready wit and pretty daughter, is made familiar at once; the stranger, Michael Lambourne, praises his unrecognized (or by him thought unrecognized) self, as a " gallant cavalier," a " likely fellow," and hears himself described as one without the courage of a hen partridge, and with the look of a dog with a bottle at its tail. A splendidly devised scene, in which the reader's interest is at once awakened. And here is another admirable opening; Balzac's " Curé de Tours ":

" In the beginning of the autumn of the year 1826, the principal person in this history—the Abbé Birotteau—on his

way home from the house at which he had been spending the evening, was surprised by a shower."

As a critic has already pointed out, there is nothing superfluous here; the hero is introduced at once; we are told at once of his small discomforts, so important in the subsequent story. Balzac, by the way, took ten days to plan his tale.

"Esmond" opens with a striking passage on the old drama of Greece:

"The actor in the old tragedies, as we read, piped their iambics to a tune, speaking from under a mask, and wearing stilts and a great head-dress."

But the beginning of "Barry Lyndon" is more arresting and indicative of what may follow: "Since the days of Adam, there has been hardly a mischief done in this world but a woman has been at the bottom of it. Ever since ours was a family——" and we are told what a mighty part women have played with the destinies of the race of Barry of Barryogue.

I like the beginning of that remarkable historical novel "The Fifth Queen," by Ford Madox Hueffer (Ford):

"Magister Nicholas Udal, the Lady Mary's pedagogue, was very hungry and very cold. He stood undecided in the mud of a lane in the Austin Friars. The quickset hedges on either side were only waist high and did not shelter him. The little houses all round him of white daub with grey corner beams had been part of the old friars' stables and offices. All that neighbourhood was a maze of dwellings and gardens, with the hedges dry, the orchard trees bare with frost, the arbours wintry and deserted."

There you have a finely painted setting for the fine and stirring drama to come. Another modern historical novelist, Miss Marjorie Bowen, is sometimes very happy in her openings. I notice that one (the beginning of "Black Magic") has been specially commended by Mr. Kennedy Williamson;

quoting the brief sentence, " In the large room of a house in a certain quiet city in Flanders a man sat gilding a devil," he says, " That as an opening sentence has always seemed to me a touch of genius." An exceptionally good opening is that of " Don Quixote " : " Down in a village of La Mancha, the name of which I have no desire to recollect, there lived, not long ago, one of those gentlemen who usually keeps a lance upon the rack, an old buckler, a lean horse and a coursing greyhound."

" I want to hear the swords clash," said Stevenson, " I want a book to begin in a good way." Charles Kingsley remarked of a non-historical book, " Tom Brown's School-days," that in point of art perhaps the first chapter was too long ; " it will not catch boys' minds immediately enough," he wrote, " and serve as a keystone to the whole ; which is important." And writers for older readers will do well to consider these two points.

There are nine-and-sixty ways of writing tribal lays and every single one of them may be right—but some will be righter than others. The stereotyped " Once Upon a Time " was no bad opening ; treading on its heels came hero or heroine, and the adventure. It served, with a variation, as the opening of that delightful little book so popular in Italy, " Le Avventure di Pinocchio," " C. Collodi's " story of a log of wood which came to life and became a boy.

" ' C'era una volta . . .'

" ' —Un re !'—diranno subito i mieie piccoli lettori.

" ' No, ragazzi, avete sbagliato. C'era una volta un pezzo di legno.' "

" ' There was once upon a time '—' A King !' will cry at once my small readers. ' No, children, you are mistaken. There was once upon a time a piece of wood.' "

II

Dickens, it has been said, went round and about as a bird goes round and about a lump of sugar in its cage when he began a novel. His one great success with the historical novel certainly caused him immense trouble at the start, but with him it was again the difficulty of selection and omission, the difficulty of excess of ideas rather than dearth. The ending of a book is less easy than the start. In " A Tale of Two Cities " we discover a reason for this ; the story should have ended sooner, closer upon the climax. Comparatively few novelists know when and how to end. The old method was to explain the whereabouts and final adventures of the subsidiary characters. They crowd the stage just before the fall of the curtain like actors and actresses in a popular revue ; all must appear, however small and insignificant the part has been, and make their bows together. You find this characteristic of Charles Dickens. In " Kenilworth," which began so admirably, Scott also at the end speaks of the " inferior characters " and their fates. In actual life men and women come and pass and vanish—" ships that pass in the night." The modern method takes less trouble to tie all the loose threads of a book, or to " put away the puppets " packed and arranged neatly when the play is over. One may glance for a passing moment at a few endings more or less successful. Stevenson ends " The Master of Ballantrae " appropriately enough, considering the nature of his story, with an inscription chiselled on a boulder, " with a copy of which," he writes, " I may fitly bring my narrative to a close " ; the epitaphs skilfully remind one of the contents of the book. " Q " ends " The Splendid Spur " with three effective lines :

" I watch'd her standing in the stern and waving, till she was under the *Godsend's* side : then turn'd, and mounting Molly, rode inland to the wars."

"Hetty Wesley," his finest novel, ends with Wesley's hymn:

"The man who was to be the great Duke of Wellington stared for a moment, lost in thought, at his rear-guard mounting the farther slope of the gulley. And as the British guns rolled onward into the dusk, back from the glimmering pass were borne the words of Wesley, Handel's music wafting them on its majestic wings:

> "Rejoice, the Lord is King!
> Your Lord and God adore:
> Mortals, give thanks and sing
> And triumph evermore.
> Lift up your heart, lift up your voice—
> Rejoice! again I say, Rejoice!"

"Harry Revel" concludes in a different vein, but also with verse—by Miss Plinlimmon, who comes directly (almost too directly, but she is very delightful) out of the pages of Dickens:

"'And I have composed a stanza upon you,' she whispered, 'if you care for such things any longer. But you must understand that it has been, so to speak, improvised, and—what with the supper and one thing and another—I have had no time to polish it.'

"I said sleepily that, unpolished though it were, I wished to hear it thus; and here it is:

> "'Wounded hero, you were shattered
> In the ankle—do not start!
> Much, much more it would have mattered
> In the immediate neighbourhood of the heart.
> The bullet sped comparatively wide;
> And you survive, to be old England's pride.'"

"Nicky-Nan, Reservist," finishes well with Nicky-Nan, on his way to the coast-road, catching sight of young Obed and young Seth tramping to the inland barracks:

"It did not occur to them to turn on the chance of sighting him and waving a hand. The two were comrades already, sharing talk, on this their first stage towards the battlefields of Flanders."

Here is the beautiful ending of a fine book, "The Lost Fight," by Miss H. F. M. Prescott, author also of that notable and extremely well-written historical novel of feudal France, "The Unhurrying Chase":

"For a long time (Father Thomas) sat there beside the dead man, with his knees drawn up to his chin, and his arms about them. He had cried until he had no more tears, and now his mind was a dark and aching blank.

"Yet in that darkness, not seen, not heard, not yet understood, a ghost of comfort stirred. *He* saw no hope, but Adam had been sure that all was well.

"The grey afternoon turned to dusk in the pine wood. There was no sound but the crooning of the wood-pigeons, and the softest stir of wind in the upper boughs, like the distant, hushed voice of the sea."

I came across recently a mid-eighteenth century (1756) "Compleat Letter Writer, or New and Polite English Secretary, including Grammar and Spelling Dictionary"—by the way, I forgot unfortunately to look up the spelling of "Compleat." In this was a letter supposed to be written by a Lady Goodford to her daughter, a girl of fourteen, giving advice about her reading. "Well-wrote novels," she said, "are an Amusement in which you may indulge yourself; but History is what I would chiefly recommend; without some knowledge of this you will be accounted at best but an elegant Trifler." Both Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and Miss Prescott might satisfy Lady Goodford, for they introduce a knowledge of history into "well-wrote novels." And here is an excellent hint from the same book; it justifies diversities of style and of endings. A young lady on a coach journey is writing to a friend:

"The money and book came safe as a Roach. Safe is so common an Expression that I'm tired of telling People for ever 'Things came safe.' We geniusses are forced to vary our Expressions, and invent new Terms; as well to show our surprising Compass of Thought, as our great Command of Language. This sometimes appears stiff or

affected to the Common Class of Readers or Hearers, who are apt to be out of their Element, upon hearing any new or unusual Sounds; but our nicer Ears cannot always bear the same Cadences."

Conrad's last novel "Suspense," ends abruptly, but on a profoundly significant note when the author laid down his pen; had this been the ending of a fully completed novel it would still have been a great ending. In "Vanity Fair" you have a notable passage, one of the finest in all fiction, which, although it does not finish the book itself, gives just that impression to make the reader at a novel's close lay it down with a murmured "Magnificent!" You remember George Osborne's death on the field of Waterloo:

"All day long whilst the women were praying ten miles away the lines of the dauntless English infantry were receiving and repelling the furious charge of the French horsemen. Guns which were heard at Brussels were ploughing up their ranks, and comrades falling, and the resolute survivors closing in. Towards evening the attack of the French, repulsed and resisted so bravely, slackens in its fury. They had other foes besides the British to engage, or were preparing for a final onset. It came at last, the columns of the Imperial Guard marched up the hill of St. Jean, at length and at once to sweep the English from the height which they had maintained that day, and, spite of all, unscathed by the thunder of the artillery, which hurled death from the English lines as the dark rolling column pressed on and up the hill. It seemed almost to crest the eminence, when it began to wave and falter. Then at last the English troops rushed from the post from which no enemy had been able to dislodge them, and the Guards turned and fled. No more firing was heard at Brussels; the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came on the field and city, and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart."

"Ivanhoe" ends weakly, I think, with a quotation from Dr. Johnson—his lines on Charles of Sweden. Scott might have managed better than to introduce the Great Cham of

Literature into a novel which derives its main interest from the age of chivalry. " The Three Musketeers " ends in the old-fashioned way by disposing of the minor characters. The last chapter in " Notre Dame " is headed " Le Mariage de Quasi-modo " ; the last paragraph is grim enough to justify some of Goethe's comments on this book.

The public taste is generally in favour of happy endings, but recent instances have shown that a gloomy or tragic close are no insuperable obstacles to the success of a really powerful novel. An amusing story was told by Hans Andersen in his Autobiography of a famous Danish composer, Weyse, who tried in collaboration with Andersen to turn " Kenilworth " into an opera. Weyse disliked unhappy situations and endings so much that he made Amy marry Leicester, and Elizabeth cry, " Proud England, I am thine !" It is as well, perhaps, for an historical novelist who is concerned with tragedy to bear in mind a certain Merryman in the Prologue to Faust :

> " A sprightly fellow's presence at your play
> Methinks should always go for something too,
> Whose ready wit a genial vein inspires."

The difficulties of an ending are (1) not to end too soon ; (2) not to end too late. Richard Steele's warning not to raise the expectation of the reader too high, and then let him down with a " That's all !" is worth bearing carefully in mind ; there is an art in knowing the exact moment when to end. Not many books can compare with " The Vicomte de Bragelonne," which readers like Stevenson would wish to go on for ever.

But more difficult to the writer (and often to the reader) than the start or conclusion of a novel is the part of it which lies mid-way between beginning and end. At the start your difficulties have not really begun. At the end they are over, for good or bad. Augustine Birrell has hit on a stumbling-block of the novelist when he says that a novel, like a beggar,

should be kept moving on. Young writers have come to me sometimes in difficulties; not often with the beginning of a book, or its ending, but with the middle portion when things will *not* move on, however peremptorily the order may be given. Perhaps the plot gets tangled. Perhaps the characters become wooden. Perhaps one has raised the fiend of curiosity and (like Scott) does not know how to satisfy or exorcise or lay it. My advice, from the frequent experience of such a difficulty myself, is to leave matters alone for a time. Put the book aside and take up something else. It is, as a rule, useless to force matters. A solution will come; perhaps on awakening from sleep, perhaps in the darkness of a cinema or theatre, perhaps suddenly on a country walk. Even Thackeray's " competent, respectable, and rapid clerk " could not help here, however efficient he might have proved at the business part of the novels. You may remember how Thackeray wished he had such a clerk, to whom he could say, on his arrival at the desk at eleven o'clock, " Mr. Jones, if you please, the Archbishop must die this morning, in about five pages. Turn to article—dropsy (or what you will) in ' Encyclopædia.' Take care there are no medical blunders in his death. Group his daughters, physicians, and chaplains round him. In Walé's London, letter B, third shelf, you will find an account of Lambeth, and some prints of the place. Colour in with local colouring. The daughter will come down and speak to her lover in his wherry at Lambeth Stairs, etc., etc." Thackeray goes on to describe Jones (an intelligent young man) examining the medical, legal, historical, topographical books necessary; his chief points out to him in " Jeremy Taylor " (fol. London MDCLV) a few remarks such as might befit a dear old Archbishop departing this life; and " when I come back to dress for dinner," he ends, " the Archbishop is dead on my table in five pages; medicine, topography, theology, all right; and Jones has gone home to his family some hours."

But there is no Jones to help you when you come to such an impasse as I mean; or the only Jones is known by a more imposing name—"The Sub-Conscious Self." In the old time perhaps his name was "daimon." I do not pretend to understand the subconscious self, but he is a good friend to novelists in a fix, who have the patience to wait. And sometimes he is a friend who does amazing and seemingly miraculous things. In the introduction to my novel "Queen Dick" I refer briefly to an experience of my own, one of many similar experiences. It occurred to me to make Swift go down to Chelsea a day or so after Richard Cromwell's death and talk to the pensioners at the Hospital about the Civil Wars in which some of the older veterans had fought. I made him, in a prologue, enter Don Saltero's café, and pick up a paper containing the news of Richard's death. After I had written the rough draft of my prologue I came across an old reference to the fact that Richard Cromwell had himself, in later life, been a frequent visitor to the café, that he was known to Don Saltero, and that one of the treasures of Saltero's Museum was a sword of Oliver Cromwell's.

The prologue was, of course, recast, but it only needed the addition of a few lines. Again and again, though he will not be ordered, this subliminal self comes to the rescue at times of need. I have no space to give other experiences, but it is a queer, inexplicable business, this writing of novels, when it is more than a mere earning of bread and butter. Something takes the end of the pen as Alice took the end of the Red King's pencil and made him write what he had no intention or expectation of writing—for better, for worse. I rather like Dickens's letter (September 11th, 1841) on his first historical novel, "Barnaby Rudge." "I have just burst into Newgate," he writes, "and am going in the next number to tear the prisoners out by the hair of their heads." And a week later: "I have let all the prisoners out of Newgate, burnt down Lord Mansfield's, and played the very

devil. . . . I feel quite smoky when I am at work. I want elbow-room badly."

" I feel quite smoky when I am at work." There you have an author who has no thought at the moment of £ s. d., no concern about his public; he is led into the thick of the adventures of his characters, and is one of them. One odd experience I have had myself over and over again is this: when I write of a storm, it is a surprise to look up suddenly and find bright sunshine; when of a fine summer's day, to glance round and see the fire blazing on the hearth, and the blinds drawn, and the lights lit.

" Barnaby Rudge " does not stand among the most notable historical novels, but it is very different from the Wardour Street fiction which may possibly carry away a not-too-critical reader, but has certainly not carried away the author himself. And I doubt if any really good work can be done unless, anyhow at times, the author is carried away. I do not say that authors are not carried away by work which does not succeed in carrying away their readers also.

Euripides has said that a bad beginning makes a bad ending. But a good beginning does not necessarily mean a good ending. " The Last of the Barons " begins well with the chapter on " The Pastime-Ground of Old Cockayne ":

" Westward, beyond the still pleasant, but even then, no longer solitary hamlet of Charing, a broad space, broken here and there by scattered houses and venerable pollards, in the early spring of 1467, presented the rural scene for the sports and pastimes of the inhabitants of Westminster and London. Scarcely need we say that open spaces for the popular games and diversions were then numerous in the suburbs of the metropolis."

" Harold " begins even better:

" Merry was the month of May in the year of our Lord 1052. Few were the boys and few the lasses who overslept themselves on the first of that buxom month. Many a mead then lay fair and green beyond the village of Charing. . . ."

But the endings of these two books, which are overburdened with knowledge (some of it proved by later research inaccurate) show traces, at least to my mind, of the stilted pompousness and grandiloquence which marred this author's works. Take, for instance, the closing words of what is really a magnificently conceived and on the whole well-executed novel, "Harold":

". . . whenever, with fairer fates, Freedom opposes Force, and Justice, redeeming the old defeat, smites down the armed Frauds that would consecrate the wrong—smile, O soul of our Saxon Harold, appeased, on the Saxon's land!"

It has been said that Scott did not know where to end "The Heart of Midlothian," which should have been brought to a conclusion after the journey of Jeannie Deans. Thackeray seems at least on one occasion to have fallen a victim to the desire for a happy ending. Indeed, he believed in happy endings. He wrote once: "If I might give a short hint to an impartial writer . . . it would be to act, *not* à la mode le pays de Pole (I think that was the phraseology) but *always* to give quarter. In the story of 'Philip,' just come to an end, I have the permission of the author to state that he was going to drown the two villains of the piece —a certain Dr. F. and a certain Mr. T. H.—on board the *President*, or some other tragic ship, but you see I relented. I pictured to myself Firmin's ghastly face amid the crowd of shuddering people on that reeling deck in the lonely ocean, and thought, 'Thou ghastly lying wretch, thou shalt not be drowned; thou shalt have a fever only; a knowledge of thy danger; and a chance—ever so small a chance—of repentance.'"

In his Introduction to "The Fortunes of Nigel" Scott refers to Smollett and Le Sage ending because one *must* end; like travellers coming to an inn because evening has come.

In the matter of endings, I think the novelist may find useful hints in the theatre. Too intimate a knowledge of the stage has handicapped certain historical novelists—

Dickens, for instance, Hugo, Dumas, Lytton, and especially Charles Reade; but a little knowledge, so far from being dangerous, may be useful. Shakespeare understood an effective curtain; look at the close of " Twelfth Night " and the clown singing when the Duke and Olivia have left the stage; or at the dead march and " peal of ordnance " in " Hamlet," Malcolm's invitation to the coronation at Scone, and the flourish of trumpets, which end " Macbeth "; but his endings were more often tragic than merry. One play ending I have always remembered is that of Barrie's " The Little Minister "; the curtain falls tamely; one wonders, " Is that all? What a lame ending!"—and, rising again, one sees the heads of the spying village " bodies " appear above the churchyard wall.

And, though it has nothing to do with beginnings or endings (but perhaps with the more difficult central portion of a book), I think the historical novelist, whose main interest, after all, has to do with time, may learn useful lessons here from stage-craft. I was greatly struck years ago by the way in which the slow passage of time was represented in the play, " Madame Butterfly." Stevenson achieves much the same effect in his grim little story " Markheim." By the fading of day, the lighting and fading and extinguishing of lamps and lanterns, the sound of footsteps coming, passing, dying away, a spell of silence, the chiming of clocks, a snatch of drunken song from some belated reveller, in a few minutes of drama—in a few paragraphs of fiction—the passage of a long night may be represented. On a smaller scale the opening which I have quoted of Miss Coleridge's novel shows dragging minutes, men killing time while they wait in strained attention for an expected moment. I recollect Mr. St. John Ervine dealing with this subject from the point of view of the stage in one of his articles; one method is to have frequent entrances and exits during a spell of waiting; there are certain stage tricks which it may be useful for a novelist to know, quite apart from the stimulus and inspira-

tion that a great play (like a great picture; George Eliot among others was inspired by pictures) may give. When it is a question of long years there is the example of Balzac's "Eugénie Grandet." The cousin goes to the Indies where he is supposed to be making a fortune in order to marry the woman who trusts him, but he proves faithless. Her mother and father's deaths are little more than incidents. Perhaps the most interesting passage in Percy Lubbock's "Craft of Fiction" is that in which the author shows how Balzac gave the illusion of the slow flight of years. The first visit of Charles looms hugely; it is so important to the story; and two-thirds of the novel are written before he actually starts for the Indies. Balzac was too great an artist to think that the illusion could be given by a mere statement of the length of time. He painted a typically monotonous day, and showed its repetition years after, so that the reader's imagination at once saw the slow chill of time's passage descending very slowly on Eugénie Grandet. Simple statement does not convey atmosphere; the writer must show what he wants the reader to see.

XIV.—DIALOGUE AND DIALECT

"Noble youth," cried the King as he embraced Ralpho, "to you we must entrust the training of our cavalry. To certain of our nobles we have entrusted certain of our *Corps d'Armée*, but unto you, Ralpho, we must entrust our horse, for in that service you can display that wonderful dexterity with the sword which has made your name so famous."

"Sire," cried our hero, as he dropped on one knee and took the King's hand, pressing it to his lips, "thou hast indeed honoured me with such a reward, but I cannot accept it."

"How?" cried the King, "hast thou so soon tired of my service?"

"Not so, sire. To serve you I would shed the last drop of my blood. But if I were to accept this command, I should cease to do the service for the cause which now it has pleased you to say I have done. No, sire, let me remain the guardian of my King—his secret agent. I, with my sword alone, will defend my country and my King."

"Be not rash, Ralpho; already thou hast done more than any man did before. Run no more danger."

"Sire, if I have served you grant my request. Let it be as I have said."

"It shall be so, mysterious youth. Thou shalt be my secret agent. Take this ring and wear it for my sake—and hark you, gentlemen, when Ralpho shows that ring, obey him as if he were ourselves."

"We will," cried the nobles.

Then the King took the Star of St. Stanislaus, and fixed it on our hero's breast.

I

THE cavalry were the cavalry of Poland; Ralpho was "Ralpho the Mysterious," the hero of a melodramatic historical novel, placed in the Middle Ages, which was an enormously successful best-seller many years ago. Scott was by no means free from the same stilted diction, but it is remarkable how natural he could be in comparison with the writers of his age slightly preceding him. Historical fiction has suffered much, for obvious reasons, from pompous and theatrical dialogue. In any case it is only rarely that

a novelist can make his characters speak as their originals must actually have spoken. They would not be understood by modern readers. The great difficulty is to be natural and yet to convey a sense of atmosphere and reality. One has to steer a middle course between the unintelligible or tiresome archaic and the extravagances of Wardour Street. Some writers have evaded the difficulty by making their characters use modern, occasionally even ultra-modern, modes of speech. It seems to me that this tends as a rule to destroy all illusion. I noticed not long back an eulogistic criticism by Mr. Arnold Bennett of a first historical novel by a young writer, "Vivandière," by Miss Phœbe Gay. The criticism was headed "A Girl as a Master of Realism," with a subtitle, "Tremendous Theme Tackled in a First Novel." The tremendous theme was the march of the *grande armée* to Moscow, and the disastrous retreat. It is, by the way, a theme which writers old and new have tackled repeatedly; Tolstoy and Danilevski, Charlotte Yonge and Henty and Pemberton, Joseph Conrad (in his short story "The Warrior's Soul," one of his "Tales of Hearsay"—how one wishes that Conrad had lived to write a series of Napoleonic novels!), Seton Merriman in "Barlasch of the Guard," Cyrus Townsend Brady in "The Sword Hand of Napoleon", Felix Gras in "The White Terror"; only the other day I reviewed a novel by a comparatively new writer, Val Gielgud, in which, though part of the book was marred by melodrama, a very notable and powerful description of the incidents of 1812 was given. Reviewers are as a rule kind to first novels, and I am not going to find fault with Mr. Bennett for saying very kind things about Miss Gay's work. She was said to be a girl in her earliest twenties; it was also stated that she had spent seven weeks (I believe that was the time) in hard reading in a public library.

I do not know how many weeks of hard reading Tolstoy had before he wrote "War and Peace."

Mr. Bennett refers to earlier powerful work on the same theme, and remarks that Miss Gay's grip of the reader loosens when she uses the tremendous background as something more than a background. But he describes the novel (quite a good novel, by the way, in which I think I detect traces of contemporary memoirs read by me years ago, and lately republished) as " realistic in the full and best sense," having " emotional beauty " and " some grandeur," " the author never falls into the German error of confusing the realistic with the sordid " (an error into which even critics have sometimes fallen), " descriptions beautiful," " a genuine book " which has " originality, form, coherence, and sustained imaginative power." I will let all this effusive praise pass ; what I want to refer to especially here is one passage in this review :

" Phrase after quiet phrase sticks in the memory. ' The *investigating* flames ' . . . ' Villages were deserted when they (the soldiers) came up to them, the inhabitants already warned by *the telegraphic thrill of fear*.' "

There is nothing very wrong, and nothing very remarkable, about " *investigating* flames " ; numbers of penny-a-line journalists must have written of them in the Victorian age ; I see no reason why investigating flames should not stick in Mr. Bennett's memory, if he likes them. (In the same article, by the way, Mr. Bennett refers to Scott as " that great sentimentalizer of human nature who had to be picturesque at any cost," and has in parenthesis " Compare Scott's waxwork heroines with " The Ugly Duchess.") A writer has said that Homer was the first to mention the telegraphic art, but Homer's telegraph and the telegraph to which Alison refers when he speaks of a telegraphic despatch from the Prefect of Toulon announcing the landing of Napoleon Bonaparte, were very different from the electric telegraph of today. A Spanish Professor in Barcelona, as long ago as 1797, certainly read a paper on the use of electricity in connection with telegraphy and illustrated his

lecture with a toy—it was the age of such experiment, as Carlyle reminds us—but a telegraphic thrill is more modern than Borodino and Moscow; so far from being commendable, the comparison shows a touch of the prentice hand. "Sir," Buckstone made a character say, in 1838, "I cannot allow any telegraphic despatches with a female domestic—no winking here." There, perhaps, you had thrills. It is a small point, but I have referred already to Scott's error of judgment in quoting Dr. Johnson in "Ivanhoe," and to Henry Kingsley's references in a novel about Philip of Burgundy and the Van Eycks to Gladstone and Charles Bradlaugh. It seems to me that the writer of an historical novel should be most careful to avoid any post-period allusions if he wants to preserve his atmosphere and not suggest some other age to the reader. He should not, for instance, describe Queen Elizabeth as puffing like a railway engine, or William the Conqueror talking like a gramophone, or Mary of Scots as resembling the heroine of a film; nor, in speech, should he make Acte call Nero "old bean," or Joan of Arc cry "Attaboy," or speak about "blighty." Mr. Bernard Shaw certainly is not so careful as he might be; but then Mr. Bernard Shaw has an unfortunate knack of making pin-pricks in illusion even in his finest work; and I cannot forget that he makes Dunois, in his greatest play — which is *really* a great play — quote Napoleon Bonaparte.

Scott, who is sometimes stilted and artificial, at least made some attempt to strike a happy medium between the impossibly archaic and its absurd imitation by the "Otranto" school, and modern speech. He made a kind of earlier language of his own. Take as an instance "Ivanhoe," the idea of which was drawn from Logan's tragedy of "Runnamede," though as I have attempted to show, Goethe's "Götz von Berlichingen" evidently had a marked influence upon it. In the Dedicatory Epistle to Dr. Dryasdust, Scott says that he does not pretend to com-

plete accuracy " even in matters of outward costume, much less in the more important points of language and manners." He goes on to refer to the motive which prevents him from writing the dialogue in Anglo-Saxon or in Norman-French, or sending forth his work in the types of Caxton or Wynken de Worde. The whole of this Introduction to " Ivanhoe," but especially its reference to the use of obsolete words, deserves study. " This," he says, " was the error of the unfortunate Chatterton. In order to give his language the appearance of antiquity, he rejected every word that was modern, and produced a dialect entirely different from any that had ever been spoken in Great Britain." But Scott is not pleading here for the use of words modern in their origin; he argues that the use of archaisms in excess is due to failure to realize that an enormous number of words used in the old days are " still in use, though perhaps somewhat altered in sense, and spelling, in the proportion of one to ten." He says again, " Of the materials which an author has to use in a romance . . . he will find that a great proportion, both of language and manners, is as proper to the present time as to those in which he has laid his time of action."

And now take as an example of Scott's method two or three brief extracts from this book:

" ' I asked you, my children,' said the Prior, raising his voice, and using the lingua Franca, or mixed language, in which the Norman and Saxon races conversed with each other, ' if there be in this neighbourhood any good man, who, for the love of God, and devotion to Mother Church, will give two of her humblest servants, with their train, a night's hospitality and refreshment?'

(The Prior has reproved Wamba the Fool, and suggested that the jangling of his bells has dizzied his understanding.)

" ' It is true,' replied Wamba, ' that I, being but an ass, am, nevertheless, honoured to bear the bells as well as your

reverence's mule; notwithstanding, I did conceive that the charity of Mother Church and her servants might be said, with other charity, to begin at home.'

"'A truce to thine insolence, fellow,' said the armed rider, breaking in on his prattle with a high and stern voice; 'and tell us, if thou canst, the road to—— How called you your Franklin, Prior Aymer?'

"'Cedric,' answered the Prior; 'Cedric the Saxon. Tell me, good fellow, are we near his dwelling, and can you show us the road?'

"'The road will be uneasy to find,' answered Gurth, who broke silence for the first time; 'and the family of Cedric retires early to rest.'

"'Tush, tell me not, fellow,' said the military rider; 'tis easy for them to arise and supply the wants of travellers such as we are, who will not stoop to beg the hospitality which we have a right to command.'

"'I know not,' said Gurth sullenly, 'if I should show the way to my master's house, to those who demand, as a right, the shelter which most are fain to ask as a favour.'"

This is very different, surely, from the conversations in books like "Ralpho the Mysterious." Scott used his conversation to advance his narrative (even if he rambles frequently), and above all to illustrate his characters. "A character," says Emerson, "is like an acrostic or Alexandrian stanza—read it forward, backward, or across, it still spells the same thing;" and Scott, painting as a rule with a broad brush rather than with the hæmatite pencil of the old monastic limners, is almost invariably consistent. In the few sentences I have quoted, you have four types quite plainly and boldly drawn already: Churchman, Jester, man-at-arms, churl; their speech is intelligible, yet in keeping with the times.

Take again Prince John and Hubert in a later chapter:

"'By the light of Heaven!' said Prince John to Hubert, 'an thou suffer that runagate knave to overcome thee, thou art worthy of the gallows!'

"Hubert had but one set speech for all occasions. 'An

your Highness were to hang me,' he said, 'a man can but do his best. Nevertheless, my grandsire drew a good bow——' "

The 'an' here is a legitimate use of an archaism; it heightens the effect, while presenting no difficulty to the reader.

Scott, though he could draw a woman, is less successful with his women in this book; Ulrica (who passed also as Urfried) was admittedly not normal, but we see the influence of the school to which Walpole, "Monk" Lewis, Mrs. Radcliffe, and similar writers belonged in some of her utterances:

"'. . . yet were these fiendish features the mask of a spirit of light when they were able to set at variance the elder Front-de-Bœuf and his son Reginald! The darkness of hell should hide what followed, but revenge must lift the veil, and darkly intimate what it would raise the dead to speak aloud. Long had the smouldering fire of discord glowed between the tyrant father and his savage son—long had I nursed, in secret, the unnatural hatred—it blazed forth in an hour of drunken wassail, and at his own board fell my oppressor at the hand of his own son—such are the secrets these vaults conceal!—Rend asunder, ye accursed arches,' she added, looking up towards the roof, 'and bury in your fall all who are conscious of the hideous mystery!' "

There is just a hint, surely, of the familiar travelling-company dialogue:

"'His the Duke wownded?'
'Yes, my lord.'
'Mortually wownded?'
'Yes, my lord.'
'Then call me in a hower.' "

And Rowena and Rebecca converse in much the same stilted fashion. Rebecca is impressive in that really great scene of the trial, though in her speech, when she flings down the embroidered glove as a gage with the cry, "God

will raise me up a champion; it cannot be that in Merry England—the hospitable, the generous, the free, where so many are ready to peril their lives for honour, there will not be found one to fight for justice," how much better would it have been if she had omitted the words "the hospitable, the generous, the free, where so many are ready to peril their lives for honour." Rebecca talks far too much, is too fond of referring to herself as to a third person, and at times is exceedingly trying. But perhaps Mark Twain's comment in "A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur" assumes too much when he says, "Suppose Sir Walter, instead of putting the conversations into the mouths of his characters, had allowed the characters to speak for themselves? We should have had talk from Rachel"—he means Rebecca—"and Ivanhoe and the soft Lady Rowena which would embarrass a tramp in our day. However, to the unconsciously indelicate all things are delicate." He says also that King Arthur's people did not know that they were indecent. Possibly they were not; possibly their indecency consisted in calling a spade a spade.

It has been said that Scott made all his peasants kings. Of some of the Scottish peasants this may be true; and they may still be true to fact, because he knew them so well. In the trial scene in "Ivanhoe," however, we have a Saxon peasant, a cripple on crutches (but he is supposed to have been cured of the palsy by Rebecca) who is really a Saxon peasant, though perhaps a simpler word than "operated" would have been better. "And may it please your gracious Reverence, I cannot think the damsel meant harm by me, though she hath the ill-hap to be a Jewess; for even when I used her remedy, I said the *pater* and the Creed, and it never operated a whit less kindly;" and again, "Alack!" said the peasant, "an it shall not displease your Reverence, the lesson comes too late for me, for I am but a maimed man; but I will tell my two brethren, who serve the rich Rabbi Nathan Ben Samuel, that your mastership says it

is more lawful to rob him than to render him faithful service." This "Higg, the son of Snell," as he answers when the Grand Master frowns and asks, "What is thy name, fellow?" makes a touching and human speech directly Rebecca unveils herself and shows how beautiful she is. "Let me go forth," he said to the warders at the door of the hall, "let me go forth! To look at her again will kill me, for I have had a share in murdering her."

Scott is a very unequal writer, but no King has ever been drawn more truly to life than his James I. in "The Fortunes of Nigel," and in his conversations he is perfectly natural and unstilted. And how human and natural and unaffected is Jeannie Deans' letter to her father about her interview with Queen Caroline:

"She is not muckle differing from other grand leddies, saving that she has a stately presence, and een like a blue huntin' hawks whilk gaed throu' me like a Highland durk."

Dumas, like Scott, and perhaps even more successfully in many cases than Scott, advanced his narrative and described his characters in their conversations. He could be grandiloquent at times; but for crispness, humour, vivacity, he is well worth careful study. I will take a passage which seems to me one of his best. It is in chapter xxv. of the second part of "The Forty-Five Guardsmen"; many of the conversations of Chicot in this book may be read with equal pleasure and profit. Chicot invites himself to breakfast with King Henri III.

"The King began to attack the partridge soup, and was at his fourth mouthful, when a light step near him made the floor creak, and a well-known voice behind him said sharply, 'A plate!' The King turned. 'Chicot!' he cried.

"'Himself!'

"And Chicot, falling at once into his old habits, sat down in a chair, took a plate and a fork, and began on the oysters, picking out the finest without saying a word.

"'You here! You returned!' cried Henri.

" ' Hush !' said Chicot, with his mouth full ; and he drew the soup towards him.

" ' Stop, Chicot ! that is my dish.'

" Chicot divided it equally, and gave the King half."

When he has eaten and drunk enormously, Chicot says with a great sigh that he is no longer hungry, and by and by he is telling Henri about his journey from the court of the King of Navarre.

" ' I tell you, Henriquet, that you have the most charming kingdom in the world. Travellers are nourished gratis ; they are sheltered for the love of God ; they walk on flowers ; and as for the wheel-ruts, they are carpeted with velvet and fringed with gold. It is incredible but true.' "

He goes on to say that the roads were as safe " as that of Paradise ; one meets upon them only little angels, who pass singing the praises of the King." At last the King remarks :

" ' You say that the journey was good ?'

" ' You see I have returned whole.'

" ' Yes ; then let me hear of your arrival in Navarre. What was Henri doing when you arrived ?'

" ' Making love.'

" ' To Margot ?'

" ' Oh, no !' "

The King is curious ; he learns that Henri of Navarre has just found a new mistress.

" ' But this man is a Turk—a pagan. And what did Margot say ?'

" ' This time, my son, you will be astonished. Margot was delighted.'

" ' But what is the name of this new mistress ?'

" ' Oh, she is a beautiful and strong person, capable of defending herself if she is attacked.'

" ' And did she defend herself ?'

" ' Oh, yes !'

" ' So that Henri was repulsed ?'

" ' At first.'

" ' And afterwards ?'
" ' Oh, Henri is obstinate ! He returned to the charge.'
" ' So that ?'
" ' So that he captured her.' "

Chicot reveals gradually to the mortified King in this crisp, clever dialogue that the belle has been taken by force—with petards—and her name is Mademoiselle Cahors.

" ' Mademoiselle Cahors ?'
" ' Yes, a large and beautiful girl, who has one foot on the Got and the other on the hills, and whose guardian is, or was, M. de Vesin, a brave gentleman, and one of your friends.'
" ' *Mordieu !*' cried Henri, furiously, ' my city ! He has taken my city !' "

Very often Dumas will spin out his conversations by repeating the words of the first speaker, or by a succession of " Oui's " and " Non's," like an unchecked journalist counting pence for his lines. But how extraordinarily well it is done in passages like this, and how deftly the characters are shown with as few words of explanation from the author as possible, the story telling itself !

Thackeray's " Esmond " is written from the novelist's intimate knowledge of the writers of his period. As a matter of fact, the narrator himself is not supposed to be writing in the reign of Anne but in that of George II. ; he reverts, however, to the form of speech familiar to him in early life, and retained during his absence from England. The atmosphere is true to life, because Thackeray had soaked himself in the writers of that age he described. He is, indeed, one of our most accurate writers, and, as my friend Mr. W. A. Hirst has just pointed out in an article in *Cornhill*, was careful about dates and genealogies, very rarely blundering, and only now and then altering history to suit his end. The most notable alteration is the engagement of Beatrix and the Duke of Hamilton ; here he deliberately suppressed the Duke's still living wife. It is not

very easy to bowl Thackeray out, but I think the evidence is strongly against Mr. Hirst's tentative approval of the treatment of the Old Pretender; he was certainly not the man Thackeray drew, however interesting the novelist may have made him. Here Lockhart, Scott's son-in-law, said that he was amazed at Thackeray's ignorance. There was no reckless gaiety and levity about James Stuart, the Old Pretender, who was really serious to the point of melancholy.

I came across, in that immensely useful periodical *Notes and Queries*, a discussion—in 1887—about the passage in "Esmond" where young Harry goes to London and sees the Tower, "with the armour, and the great lions and bears in the moat." It was stated that the Moat was at the time of the visit a wet ditch supplied by the Thames, and indeed remained so as late as 1843. Someone took up the cudgels for Thackeray and remarked that a comma had probably been left out, as Polar bears were actually fed with fish in the Moat, the bearwards adding to their incomes by exhibiting them to the public. The lions and other wild beasts were kept in their tower within the Spur-Gate, and it was not only a practical joke to send yokels to see the live lions stuffed with straw, but to see them washed and shaved. In older centuries the bears were let into the Thames to fish for themselves.

Because he went to writers of the time—Addison, Steele, and the rest—Thackeray cannot be caught tripping in his conversations. There is a useful hint here for the historical novelist; wherever possible he should study and model himself on writers of the times he deals with; if he has to do with times far past he will at least attempt to catch their spirit and manner, rejecting difficult archaisms for simple words still in use.

One of the most successful novelists, to my mind, in catching the style of a period without obscurity is Ford Madox Hueffer in "The Fifth Queen" and its sequel. Another living novelist who often catches the voices of a past

age without being pedantic is Marjorie Bowen. Her method is to study carefully contemporary prose; in writing "Dickon" she took Malory as her model.

Among authors and books which occur to me as especially useful for study of contemporary modes of thought and speech and style are Florio, the translator of Montaigne; John Bunyan; the "Paston Letters" and the "Verney Memoirs"; Smollett, especially in "Humphrey Clinker"; and Fanny Burney.

II

Let me say a few words about a cognate subject; the use of dialect. The historical novelist will frequently find it necessary to suggest time and place by means of some example of native and rustic speech. But the use of dialect is beset with many difficulties and dangers; a novel packed with it becomes intolerable, and even genuine dialect in moderation may prove a stumbling-block to readers. Most novelists of any eminence have borne this carefully in mind. Stevenson puts a wise word which seems to sum up the matter admirably into the mouth of a character in "Kidnapped": "It's Scotch, sir; no strong, for the sake o' thae pock-puddens, but jist a kitchen o't." Most of us must confess to being pock-puddens where the dialect of another district or another age is concerned. We cannot understand, and still less can we reproduce in speech or written narrative, the modes of communication even if a district not very far from our own. As far as the novelist is concerned "jist a kitchen o't" is better than a phonetic or phonographic reproduction; he must aim at suggestion rather than at exact reproduction. Many a good Scottish novel has been made impossible or at least wearisome to the outside reader by a too literal transcription of Scottish speech.

In my own works I have frequently had to introduce dialect, and perhaps a suggestion or two from experience may be helpful. In "Running Horse Inn" I attempted

to suggest the dialect of Kent in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. Besides spending a considerable time in my district, it was necessary to go to dialect dictionaries, and keep one's eyes open for words some of which have passed into disuse, to note the curious use of " d " for " th " in certain cases, and to select words which either explained themselves and seemed to add to the interest by their quaintness, or which could easily be made intelligible by the context or in brief parenthesis. Apart from actual words and phrasings, the dialect dictionaries are very useful text-books for the historical novelist; in addition to dialect they teach a good deal of history and folklore. In " Brave Earth " I found the many different modes of speech in the West Country during the mid-sixteenth century a considerable difficulty. One had to suggest the speech of gentlefolk and peasants, of Devon and of Cornwall, of Londoners and other " foreigners." Then Devon has at least two strongly marked dialects, one of which spreads into part of Cornwall. In Cornwall the dialect varies very much; it is not always easy, for instance, for a native of Falmouth to understand a man from Redruth, no great distance away. In my own book I had also to go to the old Cornish tongue. Here were fresh difficulties; there were several distinct forms of it, the Church Cornish, the Cornish of the early drama, the Cornish of the peasants. This had to be suggested from book-knowledge, but for the dialect of English-speaking folk I went to actual living speech also, using that as a basis on which one could build in sixteenth-century words now out of use. I picked up a good deal in inns, in farmsteads, and from conversations with miners, china-clay workers and others on the roads. In a Cornish cottage I took lessons from a Cornishman; he pointed out the difference between the speech of his own district and another not far away; to show the difference between Devon speech (with which I was more familiar) and Cornish we pored over stories in Devon dialect, and he read to me

the same stories translated into Cornish dialect while I jotted down notes in parallel columns, the Devon words and phrases in black ink, the Cornish in red. The results seem comparatively meagre, but at least I was enabled to suggest local speech in a way that convinced local people. In "Here Comes an Old Sailor" I was back in Kent, but used comparatively little dialect; nor is there much in "Queen Dick," which goes to the Cromwell country for its scene; but here a long residence in the East of England helped me considerably. The Essex dialect (but this, again, varies very much in places comparatively close together) is familiar to me, as I have studied its peculiarities, and lived in cottages among the country-folk. There are parts of Essex within fifty miles or so of London where a Londoner would find it difficult to carry on a conversation even today. I do not pretend to have mastered even this, but I have written many sketches and short stories in which country-folk are made to speak much in the way I have heard and still hear them speak. While I was contributing some of these sketches to a London daily paper, I received a letter from the editor expressing appreciation, but asking me to water down the dialect a little more; an influential reader of the paper had read one of the sketches with enjoyment up to a certain point, and then, being a Sussex man, had found the speech of my Essex yokels difficult to follow.

In order to suggest dialect it is useful to go to native writers: Kingsley, Baring-Gould, Quiller-Couch, Eden Phillpotts, and "Jan Stewer" (admirable) for the West Country; Hardy, of course, and Barnes for Dorset; Keighley Snowden, Halliwell Sutcliffe, Ainsworth, Sheila Kaye Smith, Almey St. John Adcock, and other regional novelists for the districts which form the backgrounds of their books. S. L. Bensusan is the leading authority in fiction for the dialects of Essex. There is a useful note on the use of dialect in fiction by Israel Zangwill in his novel "Jinny the Carrier." After saying that he has composed a compo-

site landscape to his needs, he continues: "In these last four or five years a zealous constabulary can testify out of what odds and ends the strange, enquiring figure, who walked, cycled, or rode in carriers' carts to forgotten hamlets or sea-marshes, has composed his background. Nor have I followed photographic realism even in my dialect, deeming the Cockneyish forms, except when unconsciously amusing, too ugly to the eye in a long sustained narrative, though enjoyable enough in those humorous sketches which my friend Bensusan, the true conquistador of Essex, pours forth so amazingly from his inexhaustible cornucopia. I differ—in all diffidence—from his transcription on the sole point that the Essex rustic changes 'i' into 'oi' in words like 'while,' though why on the other hand 'boil' should go back to 'bile' can be explained only by the perversity which insists on taking aspirates off the right words and clapping them on the wrong, much as Cockney youths and girls exchange hats on Bank Holiday. I have limited my own employment of this local vowelling mainly to the first person singular as sufficiently indicative of the rest."

It is curious how Cockney speech has crept into Essex speech—or has Essex speech crept into the speech of London? One of the oddities of Essex dialect is the curious use of "do" and "did"; for example, "Hit him again, do, I'll knock 'ee down." But one should only suggest and not imitate slavishly like the Chinese tailor who copied the patch. Zangwill goes on to say: "In the old vexed question of the use of dialect, my feeling is that its value is simply as colour, and that the rich old words, obsolete or unknown elsewhere, contribute this note more effectively and far more beautifully than vagaries of pronunciation, itself a very shifting factor of language even in the best circles. It is not even necessary for the artistic effect that the reader should understand the provincial words, though the context should be so contrived as to make them fairly intelligible.

In short, art is never nature, though it should conceal the fact."

This is worth consideration, but I doubt whether a reader should ever be left in doubt as to what a character really says and means.

Scott's dialect—it has been said by a critic more competent to speak than myself—is singularly pure. But, for a moment to drift a little from dialect itself, I see that his knowledge of the Highlanders has been challenged by a writer who was his contemporary, one who in all else was a warm admirer of Scott's novels, and who knew him personally. Mrs. Grant of Laggan said that he was not just to the Highlanders, and that his examples of Highland manners were unfair. "He makes them on different occasions ready to assassinate, without their well knowing why, their chieftains. This is unfair and unjust. A Highlander, in old times, was much too ready to use his dirk in a quarrel, man to man, and held life much too cheap in skirmishes about cattle, etc.; but no people on earth have such a horror of assassination. Of taking the life of another without risking one's own there is no example even in the sad history of the '45, and of murder they have such a horror they even scruple to use the term. But the consequences of a party brawl, where man is opposed to man, they do not account murder."

Scott, Stevenson, and Thackeray are all said to have failed or been indifferently successful with their Irish; it is by no means easy for any alien writer to draw an Irishman who is anything but a stage figure.

Dumas attempted in his works to show the different manners of speech in France; look, for instance, at Coconat in "Margaret of Valois." In "Romola" George Eliot took immense pains to convey some suggestion to English readers of Florentine talk in the time of Savonarola, but without much success. No novelist has ever been more concerned about accuracy, though she slips here and there,

as when, in one book, she makes a Cambridge crew row in dark blue coats. Hugo makes "Eleanor" the Christian name of an English male doctor in "L'Homme Qui Rit."

Before leaving this question of dialect and archaic speech it is perhaps worth while to glance at what John Ruskin has to say; neglected nowadays, he is still a writer who repays study. "A dialect," he says, "is formed in any district where there are persons of intelligence enough to use the language itself in all its fineness and force, but under the peculiar conditions of life, climate and temper which introduce words peculiar to the scenery, forms of words and idioms of sentences peculiar to the race, and pronunciations indicative of their character and disposition. Thus 'burn' (of a streamlet) is a word possible only in a country where there are brightly running waters, 'lassie' a word possible only where girls are as free as the rivulets, and 'auld' a form of the southern 'old' adopted by a race of finer musical ear than the English." On the other hand, he says, "mere deteriorations or coarse, stridulent and 'broad' forms of utterance are not dialects at all," nor is speech which has been affected by restricted occupation a dialect.

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing; the best dialect in an historical novel is that written by writers who, having much knowledge, like Scott and Stevenson, Eden Phillpotts and Hardy and "Q," know how to write it down "no strong, for the sake o' the pock-puddens, but jist a kitchen o't."

XV.—CHARACTERS

"A character is an assemblage of qualities."—DISRAELI: *Coningsby.*

I

DR. JOHNSON exclaimed once to Fanny Burney, "You little character-monger, you!" Every novelist is, of necessity, a character-monger.

The historical novelist differs from others in having, very frequently, to draw the characters of men and women already familiar. It has been said that it is not only a mistake to use the greatest events of history, but to depict the greatest characters in history. If it be a mistake our foremost historical novelists, from Scott downwards, have been in error. Obviously there is an added difficulty when certain portraits —fixed in the popular mind by the historians—or by tradition—exist of those the novelist attempts to depict. Directly he departs from the general conception of his character he treads on difficult ground. He may be right, but it is not easy to convince his readers that he is right. To many people "Bloody" Mary must be "Bloody" Mary to the end of the chapter, though there were kindnesses and a stubborn loyalty to her credit; Elizabeth must herself have won the long fight with Spain; Richard of Gloucester have been as black a villain as Shakespeare and Tudor historians have painted him; nor must there be a good word for King John, Louis XI., Louis XIV., Marlborough, or George IV.

As I have tried to show, history is as full of errors (or almost as full) as fiction. From time to time it revises its judgments; but the man and woman in the street, who after all are the chief readers of novels, toil *longo intervallo* after the

sober historian, and do not care to have their conceptions, formed from early school-books, or possibly from early historical novelists, disturbed. It is a risky thing for the serious historian to attempt this. It is far more risky for the historical novelist. I will not go so far as Dumas, who declared historical fiction to be not only more entertaining than serious history, but more accurate, nor will I echo the words of Charlotte Elizabeth, Duchess of Orleans, and mother of the Regent, who said that " historians are greatly given to inventing and lying." Her words, written so long before, are singularly like those of Dumas, who quite probably had read them and remembered them when he was writing his own comment. Referring to the history of her grandfather, the King of Bohemia, and to certain references in history to Louis XIV., she said, " If such lies are told of what happened comparatively lately, witnessed by our own selves, what must we believe of things that we are told happened many years ago? I believe all histories, excepting the Holy Scriptures, to be as false as any romance, the only difference being that the latter are more diverting."

The historical novelist cannot do without the serious historian, though the serious historian may do without the novelist. Occasionally he has made use of him; Gardiner, for instance, speaks of a passage in Meredith with approval in his " History of the Civil Wars." But in criticizing the historical novelist the fact is sometimes overlooked that he had gone, possibly, not to one but to many historians, and to many other sources which may or may not lie within the historian's province.

In a recent book (" Dickon ") Miss Marjorie Bowen made a strong case for Richard III., whom accepted history has so often maligned. She took the line, fundamental in our idea of British justice, that without evidence and proof of guilt no man should be held guilty. I am not sure that there is evidence that Richard, with all the good proved to his credit, was quite so fine a character as Miss Bowen makes

him; it is certain, however, that he was very different from the hump-backed monster of old and prejudiced tales. Yet there he has been placed on record, and there he may possibly, for years ahead, remain in the popular view. I attempted recently in my novel "Queen Dick" to show that Richard Cromwell, who said that he would have no drop of blood shed to keep him great, who certainly felt some sympathy with King Charles, who proved after his deposition that he was ready to take the burden of office if he were recalled by constitutional means, who did not go abroad until the Restoration made his presence in England both useless and impossible, who spent a harmless old age in the company of friends like Howe and Watts, and was always doing kindly and generous things—who died telling his daughters who had wronged him to live in love, for he was going to the God of love—I attempted, after two years study, to show that he was by no means the contemptible nonentity history has made him out. Yet several of the reviews, friendly as they all were, preferred to accept the casual verdict of Carlyle who had evidently made no special study of Richard, and attached undue importance to Oliver's letters in which, when time could be spared from the business of bloodshed, the forceful parent chid his son in pious phrases for peccadilloes.

"Yes, that is exactly what I think myself," is what the average reader likes to say when putting down a book, just as the average member of a congregation likes to feel that a preacher voices his own views. A writer who is out for popularity and huge sales will do well to bear this in mind. But a writer who has different ends in view, and lets cash and credit go when engaged on his book, may be more satisfied in other ways with the ultimate result. It is obvious that he must have drawn a picture which is true to his own view, and not merely a sensational distortion. One of the best articles I have read on the art and craft of the historical novel was contributed to the *Morning Post* by Mr. E. B. Osborn

on the 23rd of April, 1929. Having said that there are two methods by which history may be made to pass into a novel, Mr. Osborn continues, " In the first place it can supply the metal for the novelist's mould ; provided, of course, the fire of imagination is present which changes hard fact into that liquid flow of implied possibilities whence the sparks fly upwards. The novelist, though he may invent all the characters, dialogues and incidents, must be faithful in his inventions to the spirit of his period—no easy matter, if only because he must always remember that the men and women of, say, fifteenth century England did not know, as he does, all that was actually to happen in the autumn following. He need not distort the characters of actual historical people or take liberties with the chronological table, or in any way alter the great critical episodes of the past." The second method, where a plot taken from history is utilized, demands a larger degree of fidelity to documentary evidences. Mr. Osborn, who especially recommends the study of Scott to young writers, remarks that in the work of most historical novelists the two methods are combined, as Scott has combined them in " Ivanhoe "—and mentions the conversation of Gurth and Wamba about swine and pork as an illustration of the first method, and the introduction of Richard I. and Robin Hood as illustrations of the second. Mr. Osborn's remarks on Scott, his comments on his stilted style, and on his mistakes about Louis XI. are well worth reading. " The modern novelist," he says, " is expected to give historical personages fair play, not to accept every picturesque label and to be content with the melodramatic convention which classes them as sheep or goats." But the picturesque label and the melodramatic convention unfortunately have a great deal to say for themselves still. The most the serious novelist can do is to form his own judgments on facts and be scrupulously faithful to the spirit of his period.

The best king I know in historical fiction (and when Collodi begins " Pinocchio " with " Once upon a time—"

the small readers at once are ready to cry "A King?") is James the Sixth of Scotland and First of England in "The Fortunes of Nigel." Macaulay pays a high tribute to Scott's picture; remarking that the mass derives value from the abstract truth interpenetrating facts, as the ore from the gold, he says that one half of James is in Hume and one in Scott's novel. (By the way, Shadwell, of whom Macaulay spoke highly, was used by Scott as a minor character in "Nigel," just as another even less conspicuous and far less popular character, Dr. Gregory of the powders, is used by Stevenson in "Weir of Hermistoun"). Carlyle, who wrote a great deal of nonsense as well as a great deal of sense, said that Shakespeare fashioned his characters from the heart outward, and Scott from the skin inwards, never getting at the heart of them. He tells us that much of the interest of the Waverley novels comes from contrast of costumes, and goes on to say, more justly, "Not by slashed breeches, steeple-hats, buff-belts, or antiquated speech can romance-heroes continue to interest us; but simply and solely, in the long run, by being men. Buff-belts and all manner of jerkins and costumes are transitory; man alone is perennial."

King James is certainly not drawn from the skin inwards. From the moment we hear his broad Scottish accent, "Admit him instanter, Maxwell. Have ye hairboured sae lang at the Court, and not learned that gold and silver are ever welcome?" to the moment of his leaving us:

"He took the drawn sword, and with averted eyes, for it was a sight he loved not to look on, endeavoured to lay it on Richie's shoulder, but nearly stuck it into his eye. Richie, starting back, attempted to rise, but was held down by Lowestoffe, while Sir Mungo, guiding the royal weapon, the honour-bestowing blow was given and received; '*Surge, carnifex*—Rise up, Sir Richard Moniplies, of Castle Collop.' And, my lords and lieges, let us all to our dinner, for the cock-a-leekie is cooling!"

we have a real picture of a real, living man.

This portrait-study is worth careful examination; it

is most skilfully built up. Of course Scott used costume and decoration ; it is a necessary, if secondary part of the historical novelist's business, and a part to which he can devote more attention than the historian who is often concerned with great political movements rather than with detail. Do we not visualize James more clearly than in the histories when we read of the confusion of his room at Whitehall, which " was no bad picture of the state and quality of James's own mind " ? Rich and costly pictures and ornaments lie in a slovenly disorder, covered with dust ; tables are heaped with huge, solemn folios and essays mixed with light ribald books, and miserable roundels and ballads by the royal author—with schemes for the general pacification of Europe, a list of the King's hounds, and quack remedies for hydrophobia. And costume brings him back to us as he was once seen by living eyes :

" The King's dress was of green velvet, quilted so full as to be dagger-proof—which gave him the appearance of clumsy and ungainly protuberance ; while his being buttoned awry communicated to his figure an air of distortion. Over his green doublet he wore a sad-coloured nightgown, out of the pocket of which peeped his hunting-horn. His high-crowned grey hat lay on the floor, covered with dust, but encircled by a carcenet of large balas rubies ; and he wore a blue velvet nightcap, in the front of which was placed the plume of a heron, which had been struck down by a favourite hawk in some critical moment of the flight, in remembrance of which the King wore this highly-honoured feather."

Let me give three royal portraits which are deftly done, and convey an impression lingering in the mind ; the first a vignette of Queen Mary I. in " The Fifth Queen " :

" Cromwell hastened over the smooth, cold floor. The woman's figure in black, the long tail of her hood falling almost to her feet like a widow's veil, turned from the pulpit ; a man remained bending down at his reading.

" ' *Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum,*' Cromwell's voice uttered. The lady stood, rigid and straight, her hands

clasped before her. Her face, pale so that not even a touch of red showed above the cheekbones and hardly any in the tightly-pursed lips, was as if framed in her black hood that fastened beneath the chin. The high, narrow forehead had the hair lightly drawn back so that none was visible, and the coif that showed beneath the hood was white, like a nun's; the temples were hollowed so that she looked careworn inexpressibly, and her lips had hard lines around them. Above her head all sounds in that dim room seemed to whisper for a long time among the rafters as if here dwelt something mysterious, sepulchral, a great grief or a great passion."

And here is a brief, flashing picture of Napoleon which in a very few words and a stabbing comparison shows us one aspect of the Emperor. It is from "The Thunderer" by E. Barrington:

(The Duchesse de Chevreuse to Madame de Remusat).
"Napoleon trotted up to me on those short neat legs of his which, with his fat little figure, always reminded me of a well-turned-out pig in tights."

And here is a monarch who is less conspicuous than some others in fiction, and even here he does not come very prominently into notice, though he is not exactly somewhere round the corner, as Leslie Stephen would have had him. Herman Melville is not, as a rule, regarded as an historical novelist, but his "Israel Potter" is strictly an historical novel, a story of the days of the American Revolution which introduces Benjamin Franklin, Horne Tooke, John Paul Jones (one of the foremost figures of American historical fiction) and George the Third. This book, by the way, has a curious dedication, "To his Highness the Bunker Hill Monument." It is a book of Melville's which has a peculiar interest since in it he seems to have made his story of past days really an allegory of his own life.

Israel Potter comes to England, and speaks of its open country as "one bright, broad park, paled in with white foam of the sea." One of his first surprises is to find that the

smocked labourers in the fields are not women but men. He goes to Kew as a gardener in order to be secure from observation:

"It was here, to one of his near country retreats, that, coming from perplexities of state—leaving far behind him the dingy old bricks of St. James—George the Third was wont to walk up and down beneath the long arbours formed by the interlockings of lofty trees.

"More than once, taking the gravel, Israel through intervening foliage would catch peeps in some private but parallel walk, of that lonely figure, not more shadowy with overhanging leaves than with the shade of royal meditations. . . . As he was one day gravelling a little by-walk, wrapped in thought, the King turning a clump of bushes, suddenly brushed Israel's person.

"Immediately Israel touched his hat—but did not remove it—bowed, and was retiring; when something in his air arrested the King's attention.

"'You ain't an Englishman—no Englishman—no, no!'

"Pale as death, Israel tried to answer something; but knowing not what to say, stood frozen to the ground.

"'You are a Yankee—a Yankee,' said the King again in his rapid and half-stammering way. . . . 'Yes, yes—you are one of that stubborn race—that very stubborn race. What brought you here?'

"'The fate of war, sir.'

"'May it please your Majesty,' said a low cringing voice, approaching, 'this man is in the walk against orders. There is some mistake, may it please your Majesty. Quit the walk, you blockhead,' he hissed at Israel. . . . 'Slink, you dog,' hissed the gardener again to Israel; then aloud to the King, 'A mistake of the man, I assure your Majesty.'

"'Go you away—away with ye, and leave him with me,' said the King."

The King questions Israel about his behaviour at Bunker Hill, "that bloody Bunker Hill"—"Fought like a devil? Helped flog my soldiers?" "Yes, sir, but very sorry to do it," explains Israel:

"'Eh?—eh?—how's that?'

"'I took it to be my sad duty, sir.'

"'Very much mistaken—very much mistaken, indeed. Why do you sir me, eh? I'm your King—your King.'

"'Sir,' said Israel firmly, but with deep respect, 'I have no King.'"

King George finally tells him that he's at least an honest rebel, and that he will see that he is safe so long as he remains at Kew; when, conquered not by the King but by the King's kindness, Israel exclaims, "God bless your noble Majesty." The intrusion of the gardener is not very convincingly done, but Herman Melville certainly caught the salient characteristics and mannerisms of Farmer George.

II

"I wonder shall History ever pull off her periwig and cease to be court-ridden? Shall we see something of France and England besides Versailles and Windsor? Why shall History go kneeling to the end of time?" asks Thackeray.

The historical novel has done less kneeling than sober history, though it is of necessity concerned to some extent with the great figures of the ages. One advantage the novelist has over the historian is that he may clothe and invest with speech and action imaginary beings. The historian is more restricted; he deals with obscure folk, when he deals with them at all, in the mass rather than as individuals; if he has to illustrate past conditions he must find some actual case—some real "Higg, the son of Snell"—and pick him out like a plum, a currant rather, from the Jack Horner pie of the crowded and incoherent past. There was, for instance, a man, actually once alive, who in the Middle Ages was tried for poaching fish and made an eloquent plea that the lives of his wife and children were of more consequence than a few fish which an Abbot or baron would not miss; another man who protested centuries ago against killing animals for sport, and advocated the humane killing of animals intended for food; historians of the newer

school have recorded them. But the novelist may, if he have the skill, take an inarticulate mob which the serious historian cannot individualize, and make it speak and act and have separate identities through men and women who, while true and alive, are nevertheless the inventions of his imagination.

Let us touch our caps like Israel Potter—without removing them—to the kings and potentates and personages, and deal generally, but of necessity briefly, with other characters of historical fiction, and the methods of various writers.

Andrew Lang says that historical writers before Scott left their characters, except the royalties and other chief actors, very much in the vague. William Congreve wrote of the French school which was generally concerned with the Constant Loves and invincible Courages of Heroes, Heroines, Kings and Queens, Mortals of the first rank, whose lofty language and impossible performances elevated and surprised the reader into a giddy delight which left him flat upon the ground." Cervantes, in spite of the ease and gaiety which carried him into so many amusing mistakes himself (he calls Sancho Panza's wife, now Theresa, now Juana, now Maria) is all against extravagances of this kind; his Canon in "Don Quixote" protests against the monstrous absurdities in books; "where is the sense or consistency," he asks, "of a tale in which a youth of sixteen hews down a giant as tall as a steeple, and splits him in two as if he were made of paste? Or how are we to be interested in the details of a battle when we are told that the hero contends alone against a million of adversaries, and obtains the victory by his single arm?" The Canon was shocked at the facility with which a Queen or an Empress threw herself into the arms of an errant and unknown knight. "What mind not wholly barbarous and uncultivated can feel satisfied in reading that a vast tower, full of knights, is launched upon the ocean, and, sailing like a ship before the wind, is tonight in Lombardy, tomorrow morning in the country of Prester

John, in the Indies, or even in some other that Ptolemy never discovered, or Marco Polo even saw?" The Canon did not foresee how, with aeroplanes and airships, fact is fast overtaking fiction. "It may be said," continues the Canon to the priest, "that these being professedly works of invention should not be criticized for inaccuracy, but I say that fiction should be probable, and that in proportion as it is so, it is pleasing. Fables should not be composed to outrage the understanding; but by making the wonderful appear possible, and creating in our mind a pleasing interest, they may both surprise and entertain; which cannot be expected where no regard is paid to probability."

In English historical fiction Thomas Deloney drew his characters chiefly from humble folk around him, whom he placed in an age before his own. He was a pioneer, but this method was followed by John Bunyan (not strictly an historical novelist, though the great events of his own troubled age influenced his work) when he invested flesh and blood with symbolic names and meanings. Scott drew monarch or peasant with equal fidelity and sympathy in his best work. He painted many of his humbler, and imaginary, characters from the living model. William Jerdan, a famous journalist who knew him, has left on record his memories of some of Scott's "inferior characters," for instance a certain village idiot who served as model for Goose Gibbie. Jeannie Deans is said to have been Helen Walker, of Irongray, Dumfriesshire; there was a Dalgetty in Scott's youth who told him tales. An instance of the popular taste that liked grandiloquence and the affectations of the school which Scott, in spite of his own defects, did so much to sweep away, is the verdict of a young lady on "Guy Mannering" when it was first published; she regretted that Guy Mannering was not more genteel. Mrs. Grant of Laggan, whom I have quoted before—a shrewd old Scottish lady with a good taste in letters, and a writer herself of some popularity in her day—relates this, and makes the comment, which reads with

a curious topicality now that German fiction is again so much to the fore, " she is like the Germans whose tragic horrors result from dull minds requiring more stimulus than others." No doubt many of Scott's seventeen hundred characters are the " deceptively painted automatons " Carlyle thought them; but how very many more are not ! Sir Walter said himself, " I have always studied to generalize the portraits, so that they should still seem, on the whole, the productions of fancy, though possessing some resemblance to real individuals." It is a point worth noting that Scott, though he drew so many portraits of men and women renowned in history, generally made some imaginary character his hero or heroine. This has been followed by the majority of his more successful successors. I see no particular reason for a canon said to exist that a prominent historical figure should not be made the central figure of a novel; indeed, I am a little disinclined to any hard-and-fast canons. We must have diversity of methods. Each writer is entitled to his own, to do his best with; there seems no reason why, because Scott made Quentin Durward the hero of a novel which derives much of its interest from King Louis and a Duke Charles of his own imagination, or Nigel of a novel in which King James and George Heriot figure so prominently, or because, to take a more recent example, the hero and heroine of " Quo Vadis " by Henry Sienkiewicz are imaginary figures, while real figures like Nero, Seneca, St. Peter and St. Paul are introduced, Hewlett should not have written " Richard Yea-and-Nay," Ainsworth " James the Second," Mrs. Babcock " The Soul of Abe Lincoln," or Balzac " About Catherine de Medici." At the same time I am inclined to think that a novelist is often more successful with a less conspicuous character of history as hero; he is given a comparatively free field when, for example, he chooses some character like the almost forgotten Irishman, George Thomas, whom Mrs. Bell makes the hero of her exceptionally brilliant Indian novel " The Foreigner," or Gian Battista,

son of Cardan or Cardano, the once-famous physician of Edward VI. whom Mrs. Helen H. Colvill makes the hero (with Brandonia, the lovely and lovable light o' love, as heroine) in her splendid reconstruction of sixteenth-century Milan, "The Lily of Lombardy." In one recent novel which seemed to me superior to its more successful contemporary, "Jew Süss"—I refer to George Preedy's "General Crack"—Marshal Saxe is supposed to be the hero, but the author has apparently protected himself by an intentional confusion of facts and dates. It is a splendid book nevertheless. Mrs. Colvill, by the way, keeps far more closely to (little known) historical facts than most writers, but she took the novelist's licence of adding a few years to the age of Aldo, and "rolled several archbishops into one." At all events they are past caring about a little liberty which at one time might have troubled some of them very much.

The "Newgate Calendar" has furnished several historical novelists with material; Ainsworth used Jack Sheppard and Dick Turpin (though he credited the latter with exploits he could not legitimately claim), Eugene Aram was used by Lytton; and Wainewright, the art-critic and poisoner, supplied not only Dickens with Julius Slinkton in his short story "Hunted Down," but also Lytton with Varney in "Lucretia." Lytton, by the way, introduced very few purely imaginary characters into "The Last of the Barons" (which Napoleon the Third consoled himself by reading after Sedan), and in her novel "Dickon," dealing in part with the same period, Miss Marjorie Bowen introduced no fictitious characters at all, though she expanded real names into personalities where facts were lacking. It is part of the work of the historical novelist to fill in gaps in actual history. Lytton was accused by critics of making himself the hero of his novel "Pelham." A curious story is told by William Jerdan of a suggestion he once made to Lytton that a novel should be written the characters of which should all correspond, under other names, with well-known characters in

drama. Several characters in "The Beggar's Opera" were to be used thus, and the plan was actually attempted in "Paul Clifford," but had to be abandoned. Thackeray drew many of his characters from life, concealing them under fictitious names. He met a real Captain Costigan after he had invented him. Once, at Spa, he pointed out to Sir Theodore Martin a seedy-looking individual at the gambling tables who was the original of Deuceace in the "Yellow-plush Memoirs." Charles Lever was introduced as Dr. L. in the "Book of Snobs," and it is generally supposed that the third Marquis of Hertford was Lord Steyne, though there have been other claimants to that honour. In his early historical novel "La Vendée" Trollope, who certainly showed considerable promise in this field, drew some quite excellent pen-portraits of the leading figures of the French Revolution; take this picture of Robespierre for example:

"The sharp nose, the thin lips, the cold grey eyes, the sallow, sunken cheeks, were those of a precise, passionless, self-confident man, little likely to be led into any excess of love or hatred, but little likely also to be shaken in his resolve either for good or evil. His face probably was a true index to his character. Robespierre was not a cruel man, but he had none of that humanity which makes the shedding of blood abominable to mankind, and which, had he possessed it, would have made his career impossible. His hair was close curled in rolls upon his temples, and elaborately powdered. The front and cuffs of his shirt were not only scrupulously clean, but starched and ironed with the most exact care. He wore a blue coat, a white waistcoat, and knee-breeches. . . ."

A living novelist who is very successful with his character-drawing, and can give us a picture not only of the external man but of his inner being, is Mr. R. H. Mottram, author of "The Spanish Farm"; two of his books, "Our Mr. Dormer" and "The Borough-Monger," can be classified as historical novels. The first links our Mr. Dormer, through his portrait, with a later generation which knew him not. There is

a vivid and memorable picture of Mr. Dormer in the early years of the nineteenth century waiting for the Fly Coach to take him from Easthampton (Norwich) to London, and the coach-journey back, in which he shoots a man who attacks the coach, is just a little reminiscent of the opening of "A Tale of Two Cities," though the story is quite different. His "Borough-Monger" is a political novel dealing with the days of the Reform agitation; the earlier part seems to me more satisfactory, as a novel, than the latter. But his characters are very deftly drawn, and he has certainly a feeling for history, and for the glamour of past days.

Dickens, in the creation of character, shows more originality and diversity than Thackeray, who, when he has taken a type, is inclined to repeat it. Mr. H. L. Mencken, the American critic, says—unjustly, I think—that Conrad's heroes are almost all boors and ruffians, and that his very love-making has something sinister and abhorrent in it. There is certainly a starkness and grimness about much of his writing, but his settings, as a rule, are "where the pavement ends," and where the refinements of life count for little. Conrad's historical fiction, however, consists chiefly of some very graphic and powerful short stories, a novel ("The Arrow of Gold") in which the history of the second Carlist War serves as a vague background, and his unhappily incomplete "Suspense" which showed, to my mind, that he had in the highest degree the capacity to write novels of the past. "Romance" was also his work in conjunction with Ford Madox Hueffer, and is an excellent historical novel of the earlier part of the nineteenth century, the scenes being laid in England, Cuba, and Jamaica. Mr. Mencken at least pays Conrad a compliment when he says that his lovers could not be played on the movies by tailored beauties with long eyelashes. Professor Lyon Phelps in his (American) "Advance of the English Novel" thinks that Conrad was overcareful for popular taste, too detailed in analysis and too minutely accurate in description—which one would

rather imagine virtues and not defects. Stevenson, by the way, had an irritating set-back when writing "St. Ives," his unfinished novel which Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch completed as well as any novel by a dead hand can be completed; though personally I think such books better left as they stand when the pen falls. Stevenson was half-way through "St. Ives" when a book he had ordered six months before arrived, and he was compelled to change the first half "from top to bottom." "How could I have dreamed," he asks, "the French prisoners were watched over like a French charity school, kept in a grotesque livery, and shaved twice a week? And I made all my points on the idea that they were unshaved and clothed anyhow."

Hugo, that tempestuous writer whom Thackeray spoke of as an Atlas holding aloft a bladder, marred his work by exaggerations; but he left us some memorable portraits in Esmeralda, Quasimodo, Claude Frollo, and (in "Quatre-Vingt-Treize") the chief Revolutionary leaders. Mrs. Oliphant would not admit that he *had* left us any historical portraits; all his characters she described as imaginary and primitive. Parable underlay much of his work; he loved to show humanity at odds against the terrific forces of nature and of fate. Without Hugo's exaggerations and bombast, there is something of this in the works of Joseph Conrad; he seems to me far more tonic and bracing than Victor Hugo as well as more real. In Hugo's works we see everywhere the great poet writing prose fiction; he too often forgot, also, that almost the whole art of literature consists in knowing how to select and omit. Zola wrote contemptuously of Hugo's heroes as puppets dressed in ruffs and robes.

James Payn said once that he found a great difficulty in reconstructing the past, and that for any writer who could avoid doing so it was a mistake to make the attempt. But possibly his chief argument was that an historical novel will not be read by a tenth of those who will read of modern life—to a considerable extent true today, though not invariably

true. He gave some interesting particulars of the way in which his own characters were constructed. He took acquaintances and changed their appearance as well as their names so that they should not be recognized ; making a short man tall, a tall man short, a dark man fair, a fair man dark, and so forth. In his note-books he set down the imaginary name under the real name, and the changes he intended to effect—but in cypher, as he had known a case in which a similar list had been discovered and read. Although Payn, popular as he was in his day, was neither a great writer, nor strictly speaking an historical novelist, some of his notes are useful and suggestive. He found his greatest difficulties in lapses of time and in locomotion ; it was easier for him to show the lapse of years than the lapse of hours, and harder to take a character out of the room than to take him away to India. Payn used a commonplace book in which to set down ideas and descriptive passages. He found that in describing a place a short visit was more useful than a long stay, which was Hewlett's opinion also. There is at least something to be said for this ; I have certainly found occasionally that a flying visit to some unknown place —a moonlit night spent unexpectedly in wandering about Verona, the arrival at sunrise in Venice, a few days in a Russian seaport, a diligence drive through the Pyrenees—make as deep an impression and produce as great a stimulus as a lengthy stay. The impression is more vivid ; for detailed work, however, the lengthy stay is sometimes indispensable. How much easier this book would be to write if one could lay down hard-and-fast rules ! But the method of one novelist must differ from another as much as the method of one painter from another ; Titian must put in his crimson cap, Tintoretto the lowering face of a Moor, Domenichino paint an angel, Wouverman a white horse, Hobbema " the dewy lustre of trees," Murillo the little beggar boy ; and each writer must manage his characters and his scenery in the best way he can after his own fashion and pleasure.

III

There is one great historical writer of whom I have made very brief mention: Leo Tolstoy. His "Sevastopol" appeared first near the close of the Crimean War in the form of sketches contributed to the Russian magazine *Sovremennik*. They were republished under the title "War Sketches"—"Voennuie Rakskazai"—when he was still in the late twenties. This book had trouble with the censor, a very deaf old general with an ear-trumpet, who was in the habit of putting his trumpet aside when he did not want to hear anything that was said. Part of his censorship was directed against soldiers who read fairy tales at night by the light of candles stuck on their bayonets.

The great historical novel "War and Peace"—"Voina i Mir"—is great in more senses than one; it followed the old tradition of immense length, and in Russian ran to over eighteen hundred large printed pages. Merezhkowski calls it a work *meant* to be historical, and said that though Tolstoy perhaps acknowledged history on his intellectual side and was even to some extent acquainted with it, the imagination of his heart had never felt it; he never penetrated, or tried, because he thought it worth while, to penetrate into the spiritual life of other ages and nations. Every fibre and root in him was really fixed in the present; the "enthusiasm of the distant" did not exist for him—the inspired realization of history, and a living delight in and regret for the past. This criticism by a great historical novelist like the author of "The Death of the Gods" and "The Forerunner" is worth consideration, even if one differs from it. After all, a living delight in the past, and a regret for it, seem to me the chief *raison d'être* of any historical novelist claiming to be great. Turgeniev said much the same thing. "Tolstoy's novel," he wrote, "is an extraordinary affair, but the weakest things in it are just those over which the public is

enthusiastic, the history and psychology. His history is a puzzle, a deceiving of the eyes with thin details. Where is the characteristic feature of the epoch? *Where is the historical colouring?*" And yet one feels a participant in that epical struggle even if it is a "deceiving of the eyes with thin details"; the artillery duel, the teeming city turning as the French advanced to a city of the dead, the duel in the fog and snow of the forest, the lurid glow on the horizon, seen from a cottage, which was evidently "some great fire at Moscow," all at least *seem* true; and why should not a great picture, be built up by brush-strokes? There is, I think, an illustration of what I have said about that difficult problem, the passage of time, in the account of Natasha at night in the cottage—the sounds of peasants in a neighbouring pot-house, the steps of passers-by, the groan of a wounded man, the mother's evening prayer and the creak of the mother's bed as she gets in, the regular breathing as she falls asleep—then stillness—then a cricket chirping—by and by a cock crowing, and again the groaning of a wounded man in another room.

And, as Merezhkowski admits, here are the great characters of the time—Kutuzov, Alexander, Napoleon, Speranski—the great battles and episodes, Borodino, the burning of Moscow, the retreat—"the whole moving, yet unmoved, face of History, tossed by emotions and for ever turning to stone, like waves suddenly petrified." Here, even, are the grandiloquent Army proclamations, and trifles like the pattern of embroideries, the furniture of a palace room, the appearance of a woman's dress, though in his descriptions he is much less detailed than Homer. Merezhkowski has a notable comment on the peculiar atmosphere or "savour" of each age of history, nowhere and never repeated; this is certainly true, and it is important that an historical novelist should do all in his power to recapture that "savour" of the age. There is an entirely different atmosphere, for instance, of the Middle Ages and of the times of the Tudors,

with whose coming the Middle Ages ended in this country; of Tudors and Stuarts; of Stuarts again and of the Hanoverians. The age of Louis XII. and Francis I. is different from that of Louis XIV., and that of Louis Philippe from that of Napoleon. But I find some of Merezhkowski's criticisms—and Turgenicv's—a little difficult to follow. As we are dealing with character-mongering, let us take what the former writer says of Tolstoy's character-drawing in this great book. He thinks that we lose the prismatic sense of distance between us and the characters, not because we are transplanted to their age, but because they are transplanted to ours; "the author himself forgets this prism of distance. The occasional glimpse of a powdered peruke or breeches, or of an old-fashioned phrase, surprises the reader like an anachronism."

And now take one point which is very important in working on a crowded canvas, and is characteristic not only of Tolstoy, but in a marked degree of Dickens; the use of trifling physical peculiarities in order to fix a character in the reader's mind. The Princess Volkonski has a slight, dark down on her short upper lip. This is brought to the reader's notice in twenty chapters, and even at her death. An angel on a grave with a similar lip reminds her husband of his wife, and her son, seen years later when Napoleon is crossing the Russian frontier, has a similarly characteristic lip. Princess Maria Volkonski, Prince Andrei's sister, has a face always red in patches, and a heavy walk. Verestchagin has a long thin neck and a conspicuous vein behind the ear. One is constantly reminded of General Kutuzov's corpulence, and Platon Karataev's rotundity, of Napoleon's plump, white hand. . . . To take only one instance from Charles Dickens, the reader is never allowed to forget Carker's teeth, or Miss Dartle's scar.

I suppose we may say, before leaving Tolstoy, that his history is at least more convincing than that of Hugo, whose account of Waterloo, for instance, in "Les Misérables," is

full of inaccuracies and exaggerations. And yet Hugo could capture an atmosphere, and draw a character skilfully enough.

IV

I think it was Sir Walter Besant who, in some rules to be observed by novelists, said once that an author should be careful not to write about a character; that he should not pause to give a direct and detailed description; but should show the man or woman gradually in the course of his narrative—a description might be given indirectly, for instance by comparison with a portrait, or even by reflection in a mirror. I do not think this can be acted upon too literally, though any device which varies a narrative is to be recommended. Of course a character's character should be shown in other ways than by mere statement that he is good or bad, kind or cruel, generous or mean.

A more difficult question is whether a story should be told in the first person or otherwise. Stevenson was fond of the first person; Weyman and Thackeray used it freely. It seems a favourite form with beginners, and has a superficial appearance of being easier than any other method. I think this appearance is only superficial. There are difficulties and pit-falls which do not present themselves at first sight; Weyman, for one, has fallen into them. It seems to me that an historical novelist is less restricted if he has the strings of all his puppets in his hands. Sometimes it is useful to allow several to tell a story, as Browning has done in verse, and Hewlett in prose. In writing "Here Comes An Old Sailor" I used legend as a foundation, and discovered some difficulty in making it seem convincing to modern readers. To overcome this difficulty I decided to have the story read in the refectory of an Abbey, and at the close of each day's reading the monks were allowed to discuss it. Thus one could have the comments of different types on the portion that had been read; raising and explaining away

difficulties, the modernist (of his day) taking one side, the fundamentalist (of his day) another, and so forth.

But each writer must choose the method that suits him best; there can be no hard-and-fast rule.

Speaking of legend in fiction, and characters based on legend, I should perhaps make a passing reference to Charles de Coster's "Legend of Ulenspiegel" (Owl's-Mirror), a tale of the Netherlands in the sixteenth century, in which the author used Tyl Ulenspiegel as the central figure, transplanting him from his proper place in time (the thirteenth century), a use of legend which seems to me quite legitimate. After all "Ubique" is the motto of these heroes of old story, and they are as undying as King Arthur—or the Paladins of history with whose re-appearance Whately linked Napoleon in his ingenious attempt to show that the Corsican adventurer might, after all, have been a myth, and never lived at all.

XVI.—NAMES AND TITLES

"A good name (is) very nearly of as much consequence in literature as in life."—SCOTT.

I

A POPULAR novelist has recently tried to revive a bad old fashion: that of naming his characters grotesquely after their habits and oddities and occupations. When applied to the historical novel, the effect is to fill bygone ages again with abstractions. Carlyle said the merit of this kind of fiction was that it had taught all men history was *not* filled with state-papers, controversies, and abstractions, but with living men, with colour in their cheeks, passion in their stomachs, and the idioms, features, and vitalities of very men. "Very men" should at least have real names. Ruskin describes the characters in works of fiction as representatives of men in general; persons who have existed, and will exist again, modified only by the manners prevailing at certain periods; doing what has been done, feeling what has been felt, thinking what has been thought, and will be done, felt, and thought again. To convince a reader that characters are as living as men and women in the streets is not easy; it is made more difficult and not easier, when this artificial method of labelling is resorted to, taking the colour from the cheeks, the passion from the stomachs, and turning all into allegorical tailors' dummies, or waxwork figures in a show. One has to be careful with one's characters, even in the matter of names. Sydney Smith might have made a good historical novelist—perhaps he might have been too mindful of popular taste—there was certainly sound criticism mingled with wit when he said,

" Nobody should suffer his hero to have a black eye, or be pulled by the nose. The ' Iliad ' would never have come down to these times if Agamemnon had given Achilles a box on the ear. We should have trembled for the ' Æneid ' if any Tyrian nobleman had kicked the pious Æneas in the fourth book. Æneas may have deserved it, but he would not have founded the Roman Empire after so distressing an accident." Nor, one might add, would Geoffrey of Monmouth have written an epic of our early history if Virgil had covered Æneas with ridicule.

Smollett (whom Sterne called Smelfungus in " The Sentimental Journey ") is a good instance of the old style of nomenclature. Take " Roderick Random " with its Captain Bowling, Commander Trunnion, Lieutenant Hatchway, and Tom Pipes the boatswain—whenever did any ship sail with such a crew ! But in that amazingly clever and amusing book " Humphrey Clinker," written in the form of letters (one way in which a story may be told), the names are almost all natural ; even Tabitha Bramble, Dickensian as it is, is a possible name ; only with a few of the minor characters—Sir Ulric Mackilligut, or Mr. O'Frizzle, Mr. Micklewimmen, and so on—do we find the absurd and unreal. This writer, often underrated today, wrote " Humphrey Clinker " when he was dying ; the last words of a turbulent yet brave man to the wife he loved very deeply, " All is well, my dear !" surely deserve remembrance. Dickens managed to make certain invented names immortal, but he was often artificial. No writer ever took more pains with his nomenclature, or with the titles of his books. Take, at random, " Dombey and Son," for instances in which he seems to have striven to envisage qualities in his names, or to invent something uncommon and bizarre. At Dr. Blimber's school is the assistant Mr. Feeder. We have Sir Barnet Skettles and Mr. Toots, Solomon Gills, and (very typical) Mrs. MacStinger. Here is the evolution of his Mrs. Pipchin—" Mrs. Roylance " (from a Mrs. Roylance

who boarded him in early childhood), "Mrs. Wrychin, Mrs. Tipchin, Mrs. Alchin, Mrs. Somching, Mrs. Pipchin." In "Barnaby Rudge" unusual, but one may not say incredible, names are Solomon Daisy and Simon Tappertit, but Gabriel Varden (he is fond of Gabriels and Solomons and similar names) and Dolly Varden are happily chosen. In "A Tale of Two Cities" Roger Cly is the spy, Jerry Cruncher the resurrectionist, Mr. Stryver the barrister—there is a Solomon Pross. In other books, not historical, some of the names, especially of his aristocracy, are quite in the school of Smollett and the eighteenth-century writers. He left records and memoranda of his attempts to discover names for his characters, and these show what we have escaped. Here are some names from Privy Council Education lists: "Girls—Lelia, Menella, Rubina, Iris (frequent enough now), Rebinah, Sera, Persia, Aramanda, Doris (also more frequent), Balzina, Pleasant (actually used in the title of a recent novel), Gentilla. Boys—Doctor, Homer, Oden, Bradley, Zerubbabel, Samilias, Pickles, Orange, Feather"—all "Christian" names.

But look at the names he invented himself for use at choice: "Boys—Robert Ladle, Joly Stick, Bill Marigold, William Why, Robert Gospel, George Muzzle. Girls—Sarah Goldsacks, Rosetta Dust, Catherine Two, Matilda Reinbird, Miriam Denial, Sophia Doomsday, Ambrosia Events, Sally Gimblet." He took immense pains over the names in "A Tale of Two Cities," but Sydney Carton seemed a certain choice almost from the first, and very nearly gave the book itself its name.

Thackeray, who dubbed Lytton (in "The Yellowplush Memoirs") "Sawedwadgeorgeearllittnbulwig," had a perverse liking for artificial names, but his historical novels, where real names from history occur frequently, are comparatively free from these. "Dobbin" in "Vanity Fair" was surely not a happy choice.

It is wise to avoid such artificiality altogether, as illusion

is torn away at least for the moment. Except in his introductions Scott, I think, is careful not to strip it aside. One will naturally attempt to obtain names quaint and perhaps sometimes unusual; the strangest names are to be found everywhere, especially, I think, on old tombstones and among the hosts and hostesses—at least, it seems so to me—of country inns in remote districts. But quaint names should be used sparingly. Some novelists strain after unusual names for their minor characters, and it is a relief to find now and then a John Brown or William Smith breaking the monotony. There should be no need for warning against taking names of living and known people; yet I had the utmost difficulty once in convincing the writer of an historical novel—submitted to me in manuscript—that an actual person, comparatively well known, must on no account be used, however apt the name might seem.

A literary man who was discussing titles of historical novels with me expressed his opinion that the best title was the name of the hero. Dickens often used a name—in fact, he generally used a name: "Barnaby Rudge," "David Copperfield," "Oliver Twist," "Martin Chuzzlewit," "Nicholas Nickleby," "Edwin Drood," "Pickwick Papers." Scott in a number of instances used names as titles. Scott was curiously reluctant to let his readers into any secret by his titles; one of his reasons was that his story might run away with him, as it often or perhaps always did, and the readers would be annoyed at finding their expectations unfulfilled. I think it will be found that the majority of great historical novels are, like "Esmond," named from the leading character; there are, of course, many notable exceptions. Quotations supply a number of titles. An attractive or arresting title—and it may be merely the hero's name—is of considerable importance. Among a few titles that seem to me excellent—I take them almost at random—are "On the Face of the Waters," Mrs. Steel's wonderful novel of the Mutiny; "Monsieur

Beaucaire" by Booth Tarkington; "Bardelys the Magnificent" and "The Tavern Knight" by Rafael Sabatini; "Beaujeu" by H. C. Bailey; "Dorothy Forster" and "The Orange Girl" by Besant; "'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay" by Besant and Rice; "Mr. Misfortunate" and "I Will Maintain" by Marjorie Bowen; "The Splendid Spur" by "Q"; "Lochinvar" by Crockett; "The Rose Brocade" by Mrs. de Crespigny; "Martin Valliant" by Warwick Deeping; "The Infamous John Frend" by Mrs. Garnett (by the way, an admirable novel); "The Trumpet-Major" by Thomas Hardy; "By Order of the Company" and "The Old Dominion" by Mary Johnston; "John Splendid" by Neil Munro; "My Sword for Lafayette" by Max Pemberton; "The Laughing Cavalier" by Baroness Orczy.

But one might run on indefinitely, and these are only an individual taste.

Thomas Hardy did once, at all events, introduce an actual name into a story. "The Melancholy Hussars" gives the names of two deserters which are actual names of actual deserters. Half a century or so ago Hardy knew a man who saw the shooting on Bincombe Down, in 1801, of two German soldiers of the York Hussars. It was in the path across the Down, or near it, and another old inhabitant thought there was some mark showing the spot.

XVII.—THE SHORT STORY

Strictly speaking, historical fiction should include the drama and even verse; there is no logical reason why Shakespeare's historical plays should be excluded, or Byron's "Masaniello" or Tennyson's "Becket" and "Idylls of the King," or the plays of Chapman. Lord Chatham was once asked where he had read his English history and replied "In Shakespeare's Plays"; but they are an admixture of history and fiction just as much as "Kenilworth" or "The Cloister and the Hearth." We find not only a Bohemian seacoast, but ships in Milan, and in "King John" we have the cannons' malice, bullets wrapp'd in fire, thimbles changed into armed gauntlets, needles into lances; we know that Macbeth lived to fight another day; in fact, Shakespeare is as full almost of anachronisms and inaccuracies as he is of quotations. But we do gain from our greatest dramatist a general view of history from dim legend to his own day; in the first scene of the third act of Cymbeline he refers to King Mulmutius:

> "Mulmutius made our laws,
> Who was the first of Britain which did put
> His brows within a golden crown, and call'd
> Himself a King"—

and there is a prophetic reference to James I. in the 107th Sonnet.

I am concerned, however, chiefly with the novel, and this may be legitimately extended to include the historical short story. It is exceedingly difficult—I am not sure that it is even possible—to draw an exact line of definition between novel and short story. Mr. E. M. Forster, whose

critical work is always interesting and provocative, but occasionally, I venture to think, a little erratic, seems to restrict the novel to anything over fifty thousand words. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has put in a plea for what is generally called the long-short story; when an author has chosen the length best suited for his purpose, if that length is greater than the average short story, yet less than the ordinary novel, why should publishers frown upon it as if quantity were of more importance than quality? John Galsworthy once said that twenty-five thousand words was an ideal length. There was once a discussion, in which Dickens himself joined, on the number of miles to which his work would extend if placed line to line. But you cannot, or should not, estimate literary work by the yard measure. Other considerations may possibly mark the difference between a novel and a short story. The short story, says one, should have " a sudden twist in the tail "; and another that it should give a glimpse of a tiny fragment of life rather than the broad landscape of the novelist. I do not propose to discuss this question here; but it seems to me that some of the most successful historical short stories are vignettes or miniatures rather than full-length portraits, and that there is something to be said for the " sudden twist in the tail," though no reason exists why a novel should not end in an abrupt surprise if the preceding work justifies such an ending.

One, at least, of the best historical short stories is contained within a novel—" Wandering Willie's Tale " in " Redgauntlet." The book itself is not one of Scott's most successful, but it is better than some critics would have us believe, and the technique deserves study. You have here a tale told in the form of letters, of extracts from a journal, and as " narrative." (The recurrence of the horse-shoe on the brow when angry among the Redgauntlet family, like the Hapsburg lip and the Bourbon nose, illustrates again a simple method of stamping characters on the memory.

"*It seemed as if the wrinkles of his frown made that selfsame fearful shape of a horse's shoe in the middle of his brow.*") "Wandering Willie's Tale" is contained not only in a novel but in a letter within a novel—Darsie Latimer is writing to Alan Fairford. If anyone wishes to know how well an historical short story can be told, or if anyone has any doubt after recent criticisms that Scott fully deserves his place as one of the greatest writers of any age or race, let him study carefully this short story. Old Sir Robert Redgauntlet was "out wi' the Hielandmen in Montrose's time; and again he was in the hills wi' Glencairn in the saxteen hundred and fifty-twa." In King Charles the Second's time he was in such high favour that he was sent down "with commissions of lieutenancy (and of lunacy, for what I ken) to put down Whigs and Covenanters. He hunted them down with bugle and bloodhound, as if they had been so many deer. "And troth when they fand them they didna mak muckle mair company than a Hielandman wi' a roebuck. It was just, 'Will ye tak the test?'—if not, 'Make ready—present—Fire!' and there lay the recusant." This stout, bloodthirsty, roistering but valiant old ruffian, who is usually accompanied by a vicious pet ape, dies immediately after receiving a rent from his piper, and before he has had time to make out a receipt; when the unctuous new Laird comes there is no evidence of payment, and the piper follows his old master to hell (or protests he does, though the mutchkin of Tibbie Faw's brandy had no doubt a word in the matter) for the receipt, and incidentally discovers where the bag of money has been concealed by the jackanapes who has stolen it. In this short story you have deft character studies and pen portraits, a mixture of sly humour and shuddering horror, a careful plot, and a skilful use of words in descriptive passages. The narrative (although the story is so short) is varied by a conversation in dramatic form between Stephen Stevenson or Steenson, the piper, and Sir John Redgauntlet:

" STEPHEN : Please your honour, Sir John, I paid it to your father.

" SIR JOHN : Ye took a receipt then, doubtless, Stephen ; and can produce it."

and so on. The historic background, slight as it is, is an admirable piece of work ; dialect is introduced just as dialect should be introduced, heightening the colour without blurring the picture. The tale is quite easy to read. Picture after picture remains in the memory ; Steenie, who could play " weel on the pipes ; he was famous at ' Hoopers and Girders '—a' Cumberland couldna touch him at ' Jockie Lattin '—and he had the finest finger for the back-lilt between Berwick and Carlisle "; Sir Robert the old Laird, " in a great armed chair, wi' his grand velvet gown, and his feet on a cradle ; for he had baith gout and gravel, and his face looked as gash and ghastly as Satan's. Major Weir sat opposite to him, in a red laced coat, and the Laird's wig on his head ; and aye as Sir Robert girned wi' pain, the jackanapes girned too, like a sheep's-head between a pair of tangs—an ill-faured, fearsome couple they were. The Laird's buff-coat was hung on a pin behind him, and his broadsword and his pistols within reach . . . the rental book, wi' its black cover and brass clasps, was lying beside him ; and a book of sculduddery sangs was put betwixt the leaves, to keep it open at the place." Then the new Laird to whom Steenie wishes joy of " the head seat, and the white loaf, and the braid lairdship " :

" Your father was a kind man to friends and followers ; muckle grace to you, Sir John, to fill his shoon—his boots, I suld say, for he seldom wore shoon, unless it were muils (cloth shoes) when he had the gout."

" Ay, Steenie," quoth the Laird, sighing deeply and putting his napkin to his een, " his was a sudden call, and he will be missed in the country ; no time to set his house in order—weel prepared Godward, no doubt, which is the

root of the matter—but left behind us a tangled hesp (hank of yarn) to wind, Steenie.—Hem ! Hem !"

There is Steenie's ride to the wood of Pitmurkie, " a' fou' of black firs, as they say "—with the wild common, and little lonely change-house, and the ostler-wife Tibbie Faw; and the horse falling into its " auld heigh-ho of a stumbling trot "—a vivid description for you in half a dozen words—as the strange horseman arrests it with his riding-wand. And then Sir Robert and his boon companions of the dead and gone days, with their red wine, and profane songs, and blasphemies and sculdudderies, in the " auld oak parlour " in hell:

" But, Lord take us in keeping ! what a set of ghastly revellers they were that sat round that table !—My gudesire kend mony that had lang before gane to their place, for often had he piped to the most part in the hall of Redgauntlet. There was the fierce Middleton, and the dissolute Rothes, and the crafty Lauderdale; and Dalyell, with his bald head and a beard to his girdle; and Earlshall, with Cameron's blude on his hand; and wild Bonshaw, that tied blessed Mr. Cargill's limbs till the blude sprung; and Dumbarton Douglas, the twice-turned traitor baith to country and king. There was the Bluidy Advocate MacKenye, who for his worldly wit and wisdom had been to the rest as a god. And there was Claverhouse, as beautiful as when he lived, with his long, dark, curled locks, streaming down over his laced buff-coat, and his left hand always on his right spule-blade (shoulder-blade) to hide the wound that the silver-bullet had made. He sat apart from them all, and looked at them with a melancholy, haughty countenance; while the rest halloed, and sung, and laughed, that the room rang. But their smiles were fearfully contorted from time to time; and their laughter passed into such wild sounds, as made my gudesire's very nails grow blue, and chilled the marrow in his banes."

Stevenson was evidently inspired by this short story in " Redgauntlet " to insert his " Black Andie's Tale of Tod Lapraik " in " Catriona." Excellent as it is, it does not equal Scott's, and in places the dialect is more difficult;

take, for example, "Tod was a wabster to his trade; his loom stood in the but. There he sat, a muckle fat, white hash of a man like creish, wi' a kind of a holy smile that gart me scunner. The hand of him aye cawed the shuttle, but his een was steeked. We cried to him by his name, we skirled in the deid lug of him, we shook him by the shou'ther. Nae mainner o' service! There he sat on his dowp, an' cawed the shuttle, and smiled like creish." The story begins with the Days of the Persecution; it ends with a silver bullet; and has to do with a warlock. If you turn to "Redgauntlet" you will find that Steenie Steenson's chief creditor is one Laurie Lapraik, "a sly tod," and he has evidently supplied Stevenson with the name; Robert Louis Stevenson is Scott's debtor, as Stephen Stevenson was the "sly tod" Lapraik's debtor. Major Weir, the warlock after whom Sir Robert Redgauntlet's jackanapes was named, gives the title and leading character to a fine historical novel by "K. L. Montgomery" (Kathleen and Letitia Montgomery) authors of "The Cardinal's Pawn."

Stevenson followed old examples in putting "Tod Lapraik" and the dance "in the black glory of his heart" on the Bass in a novel; the greater of the early novelists are represented as short story writers chiefly by stories inserted in the bodies of their books, as told by the characters. But Stevenson wrote several detached short stories with an historical background. In "The New Arabian Nights" are two which are especially worth study: "A Lodging for the Night" and "The Sire de Malétroit's Door," both exquisitely told. The first takes place on a night in November, 1456, in Paris, and Francis Villon is the central character, the brilliant scapegrace being contrasted with striking effect against the honourable, valiant, pious but not very intellectual old aristocrat, Enguerrand de la Feuillée, seigneur de Brisetout, bailly du Patatrac. We have a most vivid description of mediæval Paris under snow; poor folk wondered where all the snow came from, and at a tavern window

Master Francis Villon had put a poser to his companions—was it only Pagan Jupiter plucking geese upon Olympus? or were the holy angels moulting?

"The whole city was sheeted up. An army might have marched from end to end and not a footfall given the alarm. If there were any belated birds in heaven, they saw the island like a large white patch, and the bridges like slim white spars, on the black ground of the river. High up overhead the snow settled among the tracery of the cathedral towers. Many a niche was drifted full; many a statue wore a long white bonnet on its grotesque or sainted head. The gargoyles had been transformed into great false noses, drooping towards the point. The crockets were like upright pillows swollen on one side."

The opening description produces the atmosphere for the subsequent incidents; the murder of Thevenin, the finding of the body of the poor, dead prostitute with the two whites in her stocking, the old lord's hospitality and sermonizing, Villon's "Good-bye, papa, many thanks for the cold mutton," as he goes out into the chill of a dawn just breaking over the white roofs.

"The Sire de Malétroit's Door" takes a showery September night in 1429 in Château Landon and fills it with swift and dramatic incident. There is a skilfully constructed plot in this short story, and the troops of England and Burgundy, who occupy the town under a mixed command, start the machinery going by forcing Denis de Beaulieu into a carefully set trap. The description of the Sire de Malétroit shows how admirably Stevenson could paint a miniature:

"On a high chair beside the chimney, and directly facing Denis as he entered, sat a little old gentleman in a fur tippet. He sat with his legs crossed and his hands folded, and a cup of spiced wine stood by his elbow on a bracket on the wall. His countenance had a strongly masculine cast; not properly human, but such as we see in the bull, the goat, or the domestic boar; something

equivocal and wheedling, something greedy, brutal, and dangerous . . . the smile, the peaked eyebrows, and the small strong eyes were quaintly and almost comically evil in expression. Beautiful white hair hung straight all round his head, like a saint's, and fell in a single curl upon the tippet. His beard and moustache were the pink of venerable sweetness . . . the taper, sensual fingers were like those of one of Leonardo's women; the fork of the thumb made a dimpled protuberance when closed; the nails were perfectly shaped, and of a dead, surprising whiteness."

Anatole France's "Judæus Procurator" has for its *raison d'être* the world's great tragedy; here you have as good an example as exists, perhaps, of the abrupt surprise ending a short story effectively in a few words . . . Pontius Pilate contracted his brows.

"Jesus?" he murmured. "Jesus of Nazareth? I cannot call Him to mind."

O. Henry does not come within the scope of this book, but as one of the world's greatest writers of short stories, and a master of the effective ending, it may be useful to glance for a moment at his methods. A short story in his hands went through, as a rule, four stages of evolution or development. The first stage was the quiet and yet arresting beginning. In the second stage the tale began to dip suddenly towards the plot or plan. At this point the reader begins to guess about what is to happen. The third stage shows the reader that he is on a wrong scent. The fourth stage throws a sudden light on the author's own intention.

In an article written twenty years or so ago Mr. Arnold Bennett said "that there are as good short stories in English as in any language, and that the whole theory of the unsuitability of English soil to that trifling plant the short story is ridiculous." The first part of his statement is true; the second true as far as it goes, although there seems something in Latin soil, whence the short story as we know it first grew, which gives what our own soil has comparatively

rarely given. Some of our most successful short story writers, especially when they take an historical background, have done their best work when placing their scenes and characters in Italy or France. Maurice Hewlett never wrote any purely English short stories at all comparable to his " Little Novels of Italy." In spite of Sherlock Holmes, Conan Doyle is seen at his best in the short story when dealing with the adventures of that swaggering fire-eater Brigadier Gerard. The Napoleonic era, even though he dealt chiefly with its reaction on our own native and local life, made the strongest appeal to Thomas Hardy; it inspired many of " Q's " best short stories. Stanley Weyman gave us " In King's Byways " and " From the Memoirs of a Minister of France "; he did not publish his first novel until he was thirty-five, but earlier work, contributed to popular magazines, showed the attraction he found in France and French history. Edgar Allan Poe (a little discounted now, and finer as a poet than a prose-writer) based his most popular story, " The Pit and the Pendulum," on the Inquisition, and Mr. Bennett describes the philosophy of art of this American writer as " purely Latin." P. G. Wodehouse, an English writer who has suffered an Atlantic Ocean change, and O. Henry (" more an American writer than any other " says Stephen Leacock) are concerned with the humours and tragedies and surprises of modern life; one regrets that O. Henry, who loved all history, and showed a preference in his own reading for Thackeray, Bulwer Lytton, Charles Reade, Hugo, and Dumas, and came to a keen enjoyment of Scott by way of Miss Porter's " Thaddeus of Warsaw " and " The Scottish Chiefs," did not follow in their footsteps. Sir Gilbert Parker's best short stories are of the French-Canadians.

Our own history, although the full-length novel has dealt with its conspicuous incidents and periods fairly comprehensively, still leaves much unexplored ground for the short story writer. Rudyard Kipling, among living

writers, has done the most notable work on broad lines among short story writers in his "Puck of Pook's Hill," which breathes the very spirit of an older England; though, as I have said, he has wandered from ascertained fact in his glimpses of Wayland Smith; he should be checked here by Miss Katherine M. Buck's "Wayland-Dietrich Saga." For all that, I wish his Puck could give seizin of this land of ours to the millions who are indifferent to its story. The little clacking mill which Una and Dan saw had ground her corn and paid her tax from Doomsday Book; among our stilly oaks and by the dead trench the Saxons broke on the day Harold died:

"Trackway and camp and city lost,
Salt marsh where now is corn,
Old wars, old peace, old arts that cease,
And so was England born.

"She is not any common earth,
Water or wood or air,
But Merlin's Isle of Gramarye,
Where you and I will fare."

We have our share of the great short-story writers of the world, and need not be ashamed to put their work beside that of the great French writers, like Maupassant, Alphonse Daudet (by the way, his stories of the Franco-German War, especially in the "Contes du Lundi," deserve careful study), and Anatole France, or the great Russians like Tolstoy, Tchéhoff, Gorki, Andreief, and the greater and smaller rest; or the Italians, Verga, D'Annunzio, and a hundred more. We have not yet given anything like their full meed of praise to the short stories of Stevenson, Hardy, Quiller-Couch, Eden Phillpotts, Jacobs, Galsworthy, Wells, Naomi Mitchison, Zangwill, Murray Gilchrist, Gissing, Merrick, Conrad, Coppard—to take only a few names almost at random. It is the rarest thing for a book of short stories by English writers, however good, to reach the

circulation figures of an averagely successful novel. Mr. Pett Ridge, writing no doubt with the corner of his tongue in his cheek, sums up the attitude of the public when he says of a short story "it ends (as all short stories ought to end) with

"'I adore you!'
'My darling!'"

Mr. Bennett has said, "Whenever I meet that phrase 'art of the short story' in the press I feel as if I had drunk mustard and water." Here, then, is a pinch of mustard to strengthen Mr. Bennett's decoction. A great deal of very serious attention has been given by critics to the art of the short story. Mr. Coppard has, for instance, an apt simile at hand when he says "Get your plot. Fiction without point is like a lead-pencil in the same condition," and he is right in saying that no character begins to live until it begins to speak—which applies equally to the novel. In an article by Mr. Archibald Dix on Anton Tchéhoff in *The Schoolmaster* one reads that a short story is not always and necessarily dependent on plot. "Living, as conceived by the short storyist, is a matter of intensity; the writer seeks for the great moments that have been greatly lived. Consequently, action occupies but brief time and definitely circumscribed conditions. . . . The short story proper may be said to have a morality of its own—all real art possesses it—which is neither deliberate nor intentioned; it seeks to teach no particular ethic, but exhales, as it were, a certain spirituality. Herein lies the difference between that which is anecdotal and the true short story."

As a preliminary to the writing of a full-length historical novel, I should recommend the novice to try his hand at the historical short story, paying especial attention to the work of Kipling, Conrad, Stevenson, Hardy, and Maurice Hewlett; and not forgetting to read very carefully "Wandering Willie's Tale."

XVIII.—THE FUTURE OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

"We know what we are, but know not what we may be."—*Hamlet*, Act IV., Sc. 5.

I

"The future has not come and may not come and is nothing," said Metastasio; or something very like it. But if it is to have a future at all, I think the historical novel may look forward quite hopefully. It has a great past, even though the modern historical novel is of comparatively recent development. More, perhaps, than any other form of literature it has survived vicissitudes that would have crushed any less sturdy growth. For decades at a time it has been consigned to comparative oblivion. Yet the revival has always come. The Great War seemed almost to have given it its death-blow. Old conflicts were dwarfed into insignificance for a while; with the memory of millions in arms, Marathon and Thermopylæ, Senlac and Creçy, Trafalgar and Waterloo, seemed but the child's play of pigmies with wooden bucklers and wooden swords and toy ships. There was no room for cloak and sword when minds dwelt on Titanic warfare on land and sea, under land and sea, and in the heavens over the earth.

But the revival has come, or is coming.

Men became actors and participators, and a generation had other business than suffering, enduring, fighting, adventuring, by proxy. Centuries ago Francis of Assissi, that most lovable and catholic of all saints in any calendar, said what was said in other words, and less well, by the Victorians. A novice once came to him and asked per-

mission to have a Psalter, whereupon Francis, who had no love for books, said, " Charles the Emperor, Roland and Oliver, and all the Paladins and strong men, being mighty in war, chasing the infidels with much travail and sweat to the death, had over them notable victory, and at the last did themselves die in battle, but now there are many who would fain receive honours and human praise for the mere telling of the things which these others did." The novel of history has no longer to defend itself against any St. Francis. It is no longer attacked by any Crabbe, or Todd, or Ruskin in an irritable and pugnacious mood. But the world has had its later Paladins and strong men whose deeds, filling the everyday press, and recorded in innumerable books, have for a time made the excitements, the heroisms, the escapades, the love episodes, of historic fiction insignificant if not unreal. That is passing, and will pass, as the Great War passes itself into dim memory, and history, and historic fiction.

My optimism about the future of the historical novel is based first of all on the indications that at last history is being taught in our schools with so much more understanding and intelligence. A real effort is being made by those educationalists who possess the historic sense themselves to make history interesting, and no longer a valley of dry bones. There is no question that it has been shockingly taught in the past. Strings of dates have been given preference over vivid and significant pictures. I have always felt gratitude towards one of my own head-masters who did more, perhaps, than anyone else to stimulate my love for history. An annotated " Ivanhoe " was one of our reading-books in class, and there were tales based upon history in our school magazine. We had weekly lectures on the great periods and great characters of the past; we took part in historic plays, sometimes written by himself, and wore costumes carefully modelled on actual costumes of the period represented. Once a week the whole school

was called together in a combined "Question Class"; the masters on a dais were surrounded by reference books, each having near at hand works on his special subject; any boy might ask any question on any subject, and if one master could not answer, another might; and if none of the masters could answer, any boy in the audience who knew the answer might give it. We visited museums, under competent leadership, and would perhaps study the Middle Ages at South Kensington, and the earlier ages in the galleries of the British Museum. I remember how different, and how real, the dimmest past became after the friezes and sculptures at the British Museum had been carefully explained to us. The magic lantern was pressed into service. . . . It seems to me this is the way history should be taught.

It was a pleasant experience some little time back, in a cathedral city in the Eastern Counties, to be taken into a class-room where a large class of young girls were being taught history. They had been taken shortly before to the local museum, and into the Cathedral. Each child (they belonged to the poorer classes) had taken note-book and pencil, and been encouraged to draw certain objects and exhibits of historic interest. They were urged also to write little illustrated essays, short stories even, in which some relic of the past was supposed to speak and tell its own story. Thus a Roman urn would describe the life that was its environment during the Roman occupation of this country; a pillar of a church on which some forgotten soldier of the Civil War had scratched a legend would be made to describe the days of Cromwell and King Charles. The children's papers were shown me, and some were excellent; it was evident that the past of our country was being made real to them in a way no dry list of dates and of names could ever have made it real. "We must get knowledge across to the children when it has been discovered," Mr. W. Hughes Jones said some time back, in

addressing a City of London Vacation Course on the teaching of history. " Historians generally are above or below the level of the schools, and if they continue to write for schools dead, unreadable books, then the schools must call in the aid of the novelists. I should like to have Sheila Kaye Smith writing on the Stone Age, Arnold Bennett on Babylon, Galsworthy on Rome, and Sinclair Lewis on the Middle Ages in their wonderful lucid way."

But there are modern histories for schools which are very much better than the old histories with their dull lists, their now disproved or dubious legends, their glorifications of nationality which must have English boys in a Roman market beautiful as angels, and an Englishman invariably better than so many Frenchmen and Dutchmen and Portuguese. We have plenty to be proud of without winning every time, and can afford to admit our faults and limitations while not forgetting our virtues and achievements.

It is almost incredible how careless we have been educationally in the past; with so splendid a national record as our own, and a country which is a storehouse of treasures, we have hitherto been as apathetic as some petty state whose happiness consists in its comparative insignificance. Some few years back I was being shown round the Tower of London by an official guide. He trusted almost entirely to his imagination for his facts, and was doling out inaccuracies with a liberal hand to a party of sight-seers several of whom were school-children. An " I. H. S." graven in the wall of a cell by some unhappy prisoner was " his initials, only he couldn't write them very well." At Windsor Castle I was solemnly informed by another guide that King John, at the age of ninety-two, was forced to sign Magna Charta by his son King Henry, then aged forty-two. Under the walls of Windsor I was asking the occupant of a Tudor house about its history. " Oh, it dates from the time of Charles the Eighth—wasn't it?—who cut off Katherine of Aragon's head. . . ." This is fact and not fiction.

In view of the general ignorance and indifference to history, one can hardly wonder that we were unable to quote Shakespeare correctly on his own memorial at Westminster, that a tablet was set up at Whitehall to inform visitors that Charles the First was executed where he was probably not executed, that Stevenson was misquoted on his memorial in Edinburgh, that a memorial to Adrian IV. in his native place is inaccurate. We have not advanced very much from the days when the Duke of Wellington's aide-de-camp asked him if he had ever met Queen Elizabeth.

And yet, because of the excellent work now being done in the schools, I see considerable hope for the future of history and for the future of the historical novel which depends upon history, but on which also, to some extent, history depends. At the City of London Vacation Course some time back I made a plea for the use of the historical novel in schools. I am assured, not only by word of mouth but by ocular demonstration, that boys and girls of the present day are being taught more sensibly, with the aid not only of histories intelligently and attractively written (I have examined many such books), but by means of pictures, time maps, record charts, and the folk dance and song.

> " ' Come, play us Adam and Eve," says Dick;
> ' What's that?' says little Pipe.
> ' The beginning of the world,' quoth Dick,
> ' For we are dancing ripe.' "

In the villages children are singing and dancing their way into past history. I wish we were more careful of the memories of the past which we allow to die when our old folk die. I wish the red-tape which robs our Museums of much of their value to school-children were done away with so that they could have easy access during lesson hours. I wish intelligent children with their interest just awakened were not rushed so soon into the turmoil of life. And I wish the historical novel, and the historical tale for boys and

girls written by such writers (in spite of their limitations) as Henty and Fenn, Kipling and Ker, Strang and Altsheler, and that accurate and excellent writer for whom Mr. Arnold Bennett seems to have such contempt, Miss Charlotte Yonge, who perhaps did consider a kiss rather too shocking a thing, were given more prominence in our schools. But many school-masters and mistresses have assured me that they not only study and use historical fiction, but have found it of great value. Here is one path along which hope lies for the future of the historical novel when it is serious work. Francis Bacon said once in his wise Jacobean foolishness, " Wise men have enough to doe with things present and to come: Therefore they doe but trifle with themselves that labour in past matters." He was wrong.

II

I think, then, that education is on the side of the historical novel; a new generation will value our past and take more interest in it than the adult generation we know. Side by side with announcements that another fragment of our past has been sacrificed to commercialism and speed, and that national treasures are being shipped in increasing numbers oversea to a people which should be more interested in protecting its own (I am told by an American friend that while European spoils are being captured, the relics of the American past to which every year adds interest and value are being destroyed), we see today many protests against vandalism; perhaps in time we shall follow Italy's excellent example. It should be impossible for such a thing to happen as did to my concern happen in the little Essex town where I live; a treasure here during many centuries and left " in perpetuity " was given away by a casting vote, without any adequate reason, to the town's lasting reproach and disgrace. Fortunately not every town is so indifferent to its own interests as Saffron Walden, which has taken this way of

emphasizing the old saying, " Saffron Walden God-help-us, where they can't give two fardens change for a half-penny." The generation now at school may alter all this.

And then we are beginning to see, I think, the death of the Wardour-Street novel, and the demand for better work. The level of general excellence as far as the historical novel is concerned is far higher than it was. Nowadays any " Castle of Otranto " or " Mysteries of Udolpho " would probably fail to find an audience, unless, of course, it fell into the Book Society's hands. One very notable fact about the modern historical novel is the excellent work now being done by women writers. It seems to me the one field in which women are on equal terms with men in the lists. When Scott wrote, women were already his competitors, and Mrs. Radcliffe, one remembers, however bad she could be at times, was at least better in many ways than Horace Walpole and " Monk " Lewis. I am inclined to think that the historic sense must be more frequent among women than among men ; it is certainly found as frequently. Mrs. Gaskell wrote one memorable strictly historical novel in " Sylvia's Lovers," where the pressgang plays a notable part. Grace Aguilar's " Days of Bruce " was widely read. Miss Braddon wrote a novel (" In High Places ") about the days of Charles I., and another (" The Infidel ") dealing with those of George II. Miss Yonge was taken seriously by William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites, and deserved to be taken seriously in spite of her conventions. By such novelists and others, by such historians also as Miss Strickland and Miss Pardoe—of course, a long way behind Miss Strickland—among whom Charlotte Yonge may also be included, interest in the past was kept alive when many sober historians were doing their best to kill it, or confine it to the very few. Mrs. Green may be counted among the greater historians, and in recent and present years the careful research work of historians like Mrs. Frances Rose-Troup, Professor Hilda

Johnston, Miss Katherine Buck and others shows what women can do in this field. Among recent women novelists we have such writers as Naomi Mitchison, Marjorie Bowen (also an historian), D. K. Broster, Winifred Duke, Carola Oman, "E. Barrington," Rose Champion de Crespigny, Evelyn Everett-Green, Maud Diver, "Sydney C. Grier," Blanche Hardy, H. F. M. Prescott, Beatrice Harraden, Georgette Heyer, Mary Johnston, Tennyson Jesse, Dorothea Moore, Mrs. Evan Nepean, Baroness Orczy, Margaret Baines Reed, "John Knipe," J. G. Sarasin, Katherine Tynan, Mary E. Wilkins, Edith Wharton, "May Wynne," Selma Lagerlöff, Sigrid Undset, to name only a few whose names are associated with good and sometimes very distinguished work. And in one respect the woman writer becomes complementary to the men; one of the weaknesses of the historical novel by men in the past has been the portraiture of women. Scott succeeded now and again, but sometimes his heroines were too wooden, too uniformly and sometimes tearfully good. It has been said that in drawing women he was hampered by a Quixotic chivalry. Stevenson painted a real woman, I think, in Catriona, but he was not always successful. Weyman's women were nearly all of a type, and he was far more at home with men. Hewlett seems to me to have been more successful than most.

I believe that women writers will play a most important part in the future of the historical novel, and also in the future of serious history. It is curious nowadays to read Victorian criticisms of women authors. No doubt many of these were justified when women were hemmed in by convention on every hand. George Eliot wrote a scathing essay (in 1856) on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" in which she said, "These consist of the frothy, the prosy, the pious or the pedantic. But it is a mixture of all these—a composite order of feminine fatuity, that produces the largest class of such novels, which we shall distinguish as the *mind and*

millinery species." Charles Kingsley, when writing "Two Years Ago," had a hit at American women novelists of his day; he referred in a letter to "the authoress of 'Squeaky,' 'The Narrow, Narrow World.' 'The Hills of the Chattermuch,' with the rest of the American twaddlers, male and female, who are deluging the world with pictures of American respectability—as false to fact as possible." In an article written in 1872 I find a lady who signs herself "A Woman Novelist" taking up the cudgels for her sex. She remarks, "It is commonly supposed that lady novelists are very eccentric beings, who take salt in their tea, who roam about through damp woods for half the night in defiance of colds and rheumatism; who wear a perennial series of poke bonnets; who throw open windows when the thermometer is at zero, and otherwise behave themselves in a most strange and uncomfortable fashion." She adds that the female novelist is best unmarried.

III

The recent revival in the historical novel, though it was bound inevitably to come when its Platonic year was due, began with an historical novel which had an amazing success: Lion Feuchtwanger's "Jew Süss." Several circumstances combined to make its success appear remarkable. The title at first sight appears an impossible title for a best-seller in this country. Nor, for the matter of that, was the title original; Wilhelm Hauff, author of a number of popular tales, once wrote a romance called "Jud Süss." Then the German edition had appeared in Munich, the author's birthplace, in 1925, and had excited no great attention. In its English form a very prominent publishing house read it and rejected it on the ground that they did not care for historical novels. In many ways "The Ugly Duchess" is a better book. Feuchtwanger himself and the German critics thought so. I thought so myself; it shows more competent

craftsmanship; the author has succeeded in doing what he evidently meant to do; it is a success with the ugly and unpleasant, and the nasty little episode at the beginning, which irritates one at first reading, falls naturally into place when the book is considered as a whole; it was not introduced fortuitously—I mean the episode of the Duke and the small boy who profaned the nuptial grounds. A fine theme lay in the contrast between "Maultasch's" high and glittering environment, her natural capacity, and the repulsiveness which spoilt all, and led to the drab sordidness of the end.

"Jew Süss" is a powerful book, with two very powerful scenes. But books as powerful have been written by English-writing authors in recent years. "General Crack" by George Preedy is in some ways a better book. I will go so far as to say that "The Foreigner" by "John Travers" (Mrs. Bell) is a better book. In many ways "The Golden Roof" by Marjorie Bowen and "The Lost Fight" by H. F. M. Prescott are better books. Edmund Blunden's "Undertones of War" is a better book than the enormously successful novel "All Quiet on the Western Front," which was helped immensely by a fine title and a fine ending; but helped far more by a certain Teutonic coarseness of fibre which was remarked on long ago by Charles Lamb, and by Sir Walter Scott, and which is allowed in this country to express itself in fiction when English books would be censored and suppressed. Dean Inge and others show a curious simplicity—quite admirable and laudable, no doubt—when they emphasize the value of recent German war-books in inculcating a horror and detestation of war, and showing its sordidness in a true light. Millions of people in England, women as well as men, realize fully its sordidness and horror.

I should like Dean Inge to have overheard the conversation of a number of women, mostly unmarried, in a certain library which I once overheard when they were clamouring

for an early reading of a recent German war-novel. The passages of which they had heard and the passages in which they were chiefly interested were similar to certain passages in "Jew Süss" that helped the book's popular success. I am not denying that it deserved success on other grounds.

XIX.—"A GREAT ROW AND SHINDY"

"I wouldn't mind so much, were it not incontestable that at the end of the century I shall be dead."—Mr. Arnold Bennett (December 3rd, 1908).

"Nobody but me seemed to guess. . . ."—Mr. Arnold Bennett (April 22nd, 1909).

"For a year past I have been inveighing against the increasing taste for feeble naughtiness concerning king's mistresses and all that sort of tedious person."—Mr. Arnold Bennett (January 13th, 1910).

I

"Jew Süss" reminds me of Mr. Arnold Bennett, and I make no apology for heading this chapter with a few gems, or splinters of gems, from the articles he republished thirteen years ago in "Books and Persons." On several recent occasions he has attacked the English historical novel in particular, and the historical novel in general—but with certain reservations almost invariably in favour of German and other alien fiction at the expense of our own. In recommending "Jew Süss" on grounds which seem seriously in opposition to his pronouncement on January 13th, 1910, he spoke of "that fearful hawking after the tawdry picturesque which makes 99 per cent. of historical novels such fearful reading," and accuses authors of historical novels of not as a rule fully knowing their subjects, and "consciously or unconsciously falsifying what knowledge they have summarily acquired." His remark in the same article that human nature changes completely with the centuries need not be taken very seriously, perhaps, as he has since stated that it does *not* change completely; I notice also that he now considers that "Jew Süss" has been overpraised.

On September 6th, 1928, in *The Evening Standard*,

Mr. Bennett gave enthusiastic praise to Jacob Wassermann's " The Triumph of Youth," a novel which certainly has very considerable merit. This article is headed :

" GERMAN LESSON IN HISTORICAL ROMANCE
ONE BRANCH OF ENGLISH FICTION A HEALTHY ROW WOULD BENEFIT "

He says at the end of this article :

" My remarks last week about the state of the English historical novel, past and present, have caused a certain amount of protest. They were intended to do so. I should like a great row and shindy about the English historical novel. And if there are any modern English historical novels comparable to Wassermann's book, I am most desirous of reading them. The English novel of modern life (including, of course, the American) has made immense progress since—since George Moore began to write. The English historical novel has, in my opinion, not kept up with it. So far as I know only one English historical novel in the last dozen years had to any extent excited the people who know a book from a bonbon—Naomi Mitchison's ' The Conquered,' and I could find a lot of fault with that. The *genre* historical novel is comatose in English. It is a fine *genre*, an important *genre*, a *genre* worthy of very serious attention from both creative artists and critics. Let the spotlight be centred on it for a time."

Mr. Bennett was careful to refer to " a certain amount of protest " in general terms only, and, having flung down his glove, evaded those who were ready to take it up. Making " a great row and shindy " all by oneself must be great fun, and is not a dangerous form of sport. But as the challenge was made it may be as well to examine the credentials of the challenger.

I see that in " Books and Persons " Mr. Bennett attacked, among others, such critics and writers as George Saintsbury, Walter Raleigh, Bradley, Robertson Nicoll, J. L. Garvin, A. C. Benson, W. B. Maxwell, E. C. Booth, Mrs. Humphry Ward, and Alfred Noyes. That was many years ago. In

the same series of articles he attacked Charlotte Yonge—a lady who, whatever her limitations, did know a great deal of history and its byways, did give pleasure and instruction to her generation, and did contribute to historical fiction one book—"The Little Duke"—which delighted boys and girls in the past, and still delights them, and even some of their elders today. Mr. Bennett was very indignant with a young Methodist "noodle" (his word) of a parson, who preferred reading Miss Yonge's works to his parents to the works of Mr. Arnold Bennett. He attacks George Meredith, W. P. Frith, and Charlotte Yonge with one stone. "Richard Feverel" is "sicklied over with the pale cast of the excellent Charlotte Yonge," "an excellent Christian body" (possibly because she devoted the proceeds of her writings to Christian work) "who produced stories that have far less relation to life than Frith's 'Derby Day' to the actual fact and poetry of Epsom." (But some of us, younger even than Mr. Bennett, remember the "actual fact and poetry" of a Victorian Derby Day.) The opinions of Dickens on literature were described as "not worth twopence," and Thackeray's opinions on other writers condemned him past hope of forgiveness.

And now let us see whether Mr. Bennett has grown wiser and more kindly—as a critic—with the years, and whether, as so many

> "Pin their easy faith on critic's sleeve,
> And, knowing nothing, easily believe,"

he is a reliable guide to those interested, or ready to be interested in the historical novel.

Of Dickens he wrote (July 28th, 1927): "Since I was less a boy than I am today I have never been able to read a novel of Dickens from end to end. With one exception, 'A Tale of Two Cities,' which I undertook to read and write about for a monetary consideration."

I want to pause here for a moment to quote from a much

more recent article on Charles Kingsley, whom he accuses, *inter alia*, of " overwhelming wordiness."

" He never uses two words if eight or ten will do. For instance he will call a money transaction ' payment of certain current coins of the realm.' "

" To read and write about for a monetary consideration " shows that we had not reached perfection even two and a half years ago ; there are a dozen ways in which Mr. Bennett might have said what he had to say more simply and more briefly. . . . Mr. Bennett, an inland-bred writer handicapped by imperfect knowledge of the West and of early maritime history and sixteenth-century atmosphere, admits that " Westward Ho !" can be read, " but only by a surrender on the part of the reader more abject than even a dead author has the right to demand of a living author," and describes it as a confection which he would not read again for £100.

To go back to his remarks on " A Tale of Two Cities," which he undertook to read and write about for a monetary consideration, Mr. Bennett continues, " The task was desolating. My objections to Dickens are that he had a common mind and an inferior style, and that his novels are very patchy."

Of Thackeray he writes, " Thackeray was very naughty. . . . Dickens did not sin against the light. Thackeray did." " Esmond " is described as a *tour de force* after reading which the critic had to go away to recuperate : " The Newcomes " could not be read at all, and his spirit was appalled by the deadness and dulness of " The Virginians."

On August 30th, 1928, Mr. Bennett discovered, or rediscovered, because I think I read it in Italy years ago, an historical novel by Benito Mussolini, " Claudia Particella," which in an American translation was called " The Cardinal's Mistress." After quoting a passage at which " one smiles " he turns suddenly on the obediently smiling reader.

"But read this: 'Bounding from the other man like a greyhound from his keeper's leash . . . he sprung through a second and a third room. . . . No living mortal was to be seen in either of them. He called upon his lady's name, at first gently, then more loudly, and then with an accent of despairing emphasis; but no answer was returned. He wrung his hands, tore his hair, and stamped on the earth with desperation. At length a feeble glimmer of light . . . crevice in the wainscoting . . . concealed door. He rushed at the door . . . forced his way almost headlong into a small oratory, where a female figure which had been kneeling in agonized supplication . . . now sunk at length on the floor. He hastily raised her from the ground, and, joy of joys, it was she whom he sought to save. He pressed her to his bosom.'"

This passage from "Quentin Durward" he characterizes as untrue, conventional, tawdry; and goes on to say that Scott "used the clichés of his predecessors," and did not give anything like a true or full picture of the age he described (I wish I knew the historical novelists preceding Scott from whom he drew his clichés, and I wish I knew, after considerable study of the earlier part of the eighteenth century in Germany, what gave Mr. Bennett the extraordinary idea that "Jew Süss" gives a true and full picture of that age). Scott is also charged with having thrown his novels together anyhow, and faked or omitted the most difficult scenes. In a sub-title to this article Mr. Bennett asks, "Does a Really Sound, Realistic Historical Novel Exist?" (why not "*Really* Exist"?) and ends with the remark that there is more truth in one pretty good novel of modern life than in a whole year's output of historical swashbuckling—etc., etc.

I turned at random, shortly after, to an instalment of a serial story by Mr. Bennett; presumably he would describe his own novel as a pretty good novel of modern life. Compare these passages with that in "Quentin Durward" at which one is invited to smile:

"'Jack.' . . . Her clear tones had thickened. She began to cry, and fell on him somehow in a lump, her elegance all gone.

" ' She's a great girl,' said Alan, secretly alarmed to discover that he could scarcely control his own voice. There they stood, the older ones, shaken by the spectacle of a youthful, impassioned emotion which they could emulate less and less as the years passed over them. ' Jack's all right. It's something to be in love as that boy is.'

" ' They'll have frightful scenes, you know.'

" ' I know. Let 'em. They're the goods. Pearl is, and Jack is.'

" ' You're happy ?'

" ' So are you, you little two-faced thing.' In his beatific exuberance he kissed Elaine violently. A door banged."

Wonderful, isn't it? I admit that Scott and Dickens, Thackeray and Charles Kingsley, Walter Pater and Henry Kingsley, and even Shakespeare himself, never wrote like that.

" In a beatific exuberance " I discovered, the day after Mr. Bennett had stated in this article that even the better historical novelists are content with " imitations of imitations of imitations," notice of a production of one of his plays which was a far-off imitation of Marlowe, Calderon, and Goethe, flavoured to taste with a dash of Voronoff—a medicated imitation, in fact, of an imitation of an imitation. The same article stated that he had recently failed to reread " Notre Dame " and " The Queen's Necklace," that Flaubert's historical novels were dead, that Mr. Bennett had ceased to think Stanley Weyman the genuine stuff, and that the first-rate historical novel conceived on an extensive scale has yet to be written. It was also in this article that he stated that " Jew Süss "—to which he had previously given extravagant praise chiefly on grounds not generally considered praise-worthy—was being overpraised, and also that human nature in the periods we call historical was not utterly different (as he had previously suggested) from modern human nature, but only slightly different. I should like to refer here for a moment to a writer who possesses the historic sense, has some knowledge of history, knows how to write, and understands human nature—Rudyard Kipling. He is describing life in a long-ago

day, the day of Rome in Britain. "What lessons did you do when you were little?" the Centurion of the Thirteenth is asked, in "Puck of Pook's Hill."

"Ancient history, the classics, arithmetic, and so on. My sister and I were thick-heads, but my two brothers (I'm the middle one) liked those things, and of course Mother was clever enough for any six. And funny! Roma Dea! How mother could make us laugh!"

"What at?"

"Little jokes and sayings that every family has."

The Roman father in the background is making up his accounts; he calls the children to order for romping noisily, reminding them sternly of the grim laws of Rome about obedience to parents. But then, smiling, he springs up and joins the romp himself, and is noisier than any of them, until the mother says laughingly that he is not very much like the stern Roman father who puts his children to death for disobedience.

There you have a picture that must be true.

"Jew Süss" is a powerful if frequently unpleasant book, with two particularly strong scenes; the play is chiefly based on one of these. Naemi, the lovely daughter of Jew Süss, leaps to death from a battlemented building while evading the Duke's unwelcome advances. In "Ivanhoe," published a century ago, Rebecca, the lovely daughter of Jew Isaac, threatens to leap to death from a battlemented building while evading the Templar's unwelcome advances.

Mr. Bennett, who seems to have forgotten his "Ivanhoe," does not accuse Dr. Feuchtwanger of imitation, and I do not remember any critic having pointed out that the German novel derived perhaps its most powerful scene from Sir Walter Scott.

II

Years ago Mr. Bennett won a deservedly high reputation by "The Old Wives' Tale" (the title is evidently borrowed from George Peele) and other notable work; "Riceyman

Steps " revived one's flickering hopes for him. I will leave others to decide how far this achievement justifies his " Rome has spoken " attitude in recent articles. He may be able to explain Relativity in a brief article; I do not think he has yet attempted the Fifth Dimension, but that may come. He appears to have acquired an intimate knowledge of French, German, Italian, Russian, and half the other tongues of Babel, including American. He has rearranged the pictures in the National Gallery, patted Shakespeare on the head by proxy, reproved Wagner, put poets in their place, and helped readers to cultivate their abdomens. I do not know whether he accepted the little finger a lady-novelist was willing to yield up to him for mention, but, as I am writing quite in earnest, I do beg my readers not to think that I am now yearning myself to sacrifice a little finger, or even a lock of hair, on his altar. Unfortunately certain people who like spoon-feeding take Mr. Bennett seriously as a critic, and other critics are following his bad example. I have mentioned already John Buchan's statement in *The Listener* that the historical novel is the most difficult form of fiction; I think it necessarily follows that it is the most difficult form of fiction to review. The critic must have some knowledge of history. The best critic will have also the historic sense himself—the feeling for atmosphere—the ability to see

> " Arthur come striding through the high, bright corn,
> Or Alfred resting on a Saxon spear."

Mr. Bennett does not seem to me to possess these qualifications. He is certainly writing in complete ignorance of his subject when he says that historical novelists spend their time in hawking after the tawdry picturesque, that 99 per cent. of their work is " such fearful reading," that they do not as a rule fully know their subjects, that they falsify such knowledge as they summarily acquire, that "The Conquered" (a very fine book, though there has been some discussion

as to whether or no it can be considered an historical novel) is the only English historical novel which has recently excited people who know a book from a bonbon, that the *genre* is comatose in English, and that English novelists need to go to Germany for instruction.

In his enthusiastic review of "Jew Süss" ("overpraised today!"), which he tells us everyone who respects himself has read, and 95 per cent. admire extremely, Mr. Bennett began by mentioning the crimes, brutalities, and sensualities with which it is studded, and went on joyously to tell his disciples that they must read it. I am afraid that part of the trouble with Mr. Bennett (of course I am referring to him only as a critic) is a touch of that "common mind" of which he accuses Charles Dickens. He mistakes ugliness for beauty, bigness for greatness, sordidness for truth, brutality for strength. It was not incapacity which prevented Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Reade, Kingsley, Stevenson, from writing without the reticence still observed about certain matters in general conversation. In their day Scott, and Charles Lamb also for that matter, noted and disapproved some of the influences of German literature on our own. Of "Monk" Lewis Scott wrote, "He wasted himself on ghost-stories and German romances." Lamb would not read a German book which he had been requested to send on to Coleridge, because of the very things which so often disfigure German literature today. Before the War no European country had a poorer record for fiction than Germany, and its leading novelists were nearly all remarkable chiefly for their interest in the morbid and the coarse and the sadistic. Recently continental novels each better than its predecessor and inferior to its successor have been hunted out by certain publishers who must ride every horse to death if it is cheap, and pays. The sound Grecian rule that reticence is one of the chief conditions of art seems in danger of being forgotten. Everything must be shown before the footlights in full publicity.

Many of those prominent English critics who are not engaged in writing columns about Pope, Dryden, and Aphra Behn are following the lead of Mr. Bennett. Even the otherwise admirable article by John Buchan which I have referred to is illustrated by a portrait (in a paper devoted to British broadcasting) of the Ugly Duchess whose story ends with fried fish, and the only present-day historical novelists mentioned were four Americans, one Scottish, one German, and one English who is chiefly a writer of short stories. And England and Scotland fare far better with him than with some other critics who help Mr. Bennett to round up his sheep.

My late friend, Tighe Hopkins, made an interesting reference to unnecessary realism in his fascinating book, " An Idler in Old France." Referring to Victor Hugo's description of the Paris of Louis XI.—and of " Quentin Durward " —he wrote :

" Observe the particular adroitness with which Victor Hugo evades the difficulty in ' Notre Dame ' of describing in detail the Paris of the fifteenth century, in the chapter called ' A Bird's Eye View of Old Paris.' Now a tour through the streets of Paris when Louis XI. was King, Victor Hugo showing the way, would have been a great experience ; but it would also have been in many ways an extremely shocking one. What does Hugo do ? He says nothing as to the state of the streets, but discreetly hinting that there is a very fine view to be had from the Towers of Notre Dame he carries the reader forthwith to that chaste altitude. Once there, all is safe. I cannot but think that even from the cathedral top a very ordinary nostril would have been aware of the celebrated smell of mediæval Paris, but Victor Hugo has very resolutely stopped his nose, and for that matter the noses of his readers, while he takes them to admire the view."

When, in " Les Misérables," Hugo introduced a description of the Paris sewers it was inartistic because it was unnecessary to his story. We may be told that there were smells and sewers and yet not be forced to make their acquaintance

too closely. I hope I shall not be misunderstood. I have no belief in censorship, which invariably defeats its own ends; no personal grievance against the critics to whom I have referred, and I should be ungrateful indeed if I did not recognise the kindness with which my own novels have been received; neither have I much doubt in my own mind that ultimately, soon or late, good work and bad find their own level. And literature should know no frontiers; we want the best from every country, and if "The Bridge of San Luis Rey," or "Jew Süss"—in spite of its defects and violences—had not come our way, we should have been the losers. But the depreciation of our own literature, past and present, by prominent critics is not a good sign, and uninformed attacks such as those by Mr. Bennett on the English historical novel when good and painstaking work is really being done and has been done, especially when that "fine *genre*" is emerging from a long period of neglect, call for some answer.

III

We may have a little to learn from German and Russian writers; I do not think they have very much to teach us. It is many years since George Gissing, writing to Thomas Hardy, said "The misery of it is that writing for English people one may not be thorough; reticences and superficialities have so often to fill places where one is willing to put in honest work." I have read carefully, and more than once, some of the books from the Continent which Mr. Bennett recommends for our instruction. Really there is very little the English novelist needs to learn, or will gain by imitating.

I am tempted to quote (but will not, because it is too severe) what Mr. H. L. Mencken, the American critic, has said of Mr. Bennett, the Mandarin (it is one of Mr. Bennett's own words) of present-day criticism in this country. Let me

quote instead a fragment from an article by Mr. Bennett on Brieux:

" Whenever I go into Soho I pass through experiences which send me out again a wiser man."

If only Mr. Bennett could be induced to retire into the deserts of Soho, and write something to equal his " Old Wives' Tale "! He would be better employed than in having great rows all by himself over the English historical novel, and " the *genre* Potteries novel," which was " a fine *genre*, an important *genre* " in many ways, as once practised by Mr. Bennett, seems somehow to have become " comatose in English," while he has been concerning himself with matters on which his opinion is really not of much value or importance.

XX.—A LITTLE WASTE OF TIME

I

In the old play Madge makes Frolic and Fantastic say "Hum" and "Ha" at intervals to her tale; "so," says she, "shall I know that you are awake." If anyone is still awake I propose to inflict upon him the sleeping dose of a Preface, following Scott's example at the close of "Waverley," though no less an authority than Bacon describes Prefaces as a waste of time and "bravery."

Reader, this, as you know, has been a discursive book. It is not altogether my fault that it has been written. I did not ask to write it, though I confess that some such book had been in my thoughts. I was asked to write it, and consented; my publishers must take their share of blame. Before the work was far advanced a sentence in an article by Mr. Hugh Walpole caught my eye:

> "It is instructive to realise that none of the great novelists of the world have written treatises on the novel—they have other things to do."

Mr. Walpole, who has written some novels of distinction, may at least claim the virtue of humility; he has himself written a great deal about the novel; it is not very long since I was reading his admirable little book on the novels of Anthony Trollope. Indeed, I am made to wonder how Scott, Thackeray, Hugo, Dumas, Trollope himself, Tolstoy, Turgeniev, Merezhkowski, Mr. E. M. Forster, Mr. Arnold Bennett. . . .

No; I am grateful to Mr. Walpole for giving me an apology and an excuse. When I was at school there was a master

who drove out on Sunday evenings to neighbouring villages in order to preach at small conventicles, usually taking one of the boys with him for companionship. After lights were out the boy would be pounced upon in the dormitory and invited to answer the cryptic question, " How many ?"

In his extempore prayers the preacher had broken all records for the number of " O Lords." I forget whether we had bets on it ; I think his highest score in one long prayer was fifty-nine. But then those village prayers are often very long, because the Creator has to be told what is going on in a wider world.

Gentle Reader, it has been impossible in a book like this, where I have tried to give whatever little help I can by setting down instances from my own experience, as well as my opinions, to avoid the constant repetition of " I." At least it is obvious that I, having written this treatise on the historical novel, have never written a great novel myself. You must take my opinions and statements, and the opinions and statements of those I have quoted and sometimes criticised, for what you think they are worth.

But I am very anxious that the historical novel should be taken more seriously than it has been taken in recent years, imperfectly as we who practise it do our work. As Friend Sancho Panza says, " We are all as God made us, and some of us a great deal worse." This is being written when the year is near its death, and, like Edward Fitzgerald,

" When such a time cometh
I do retire
Into an old room
Beside a bright fire :
Oh, pile a bright fire !

" And there I sit
Reading old things,
Of Knights and lorn damsels,
While the wind sings—
Oh, drearily sings !"

Sir Henry Newbolt has told us in "The Old Country" that the Past is every man's fatherland; on our own way to it, let us spare a thought for the men and women of lost years who have already passed along the road.

II

There are certain letters which men in business set at the foot of their accounts, knowing how easy it is to make mistakes. These, which being interpreted mean "Errors and Omissions Excepted," shall take the place of "Finis."

"E. & O. E."

INDEX TO NAMES AND TITLES

" A Little Less than Gods," 139
" Abbot, The," 50, 101, 133
" About Catherine de Medici," 240
Acton, Lord, 156
Adcock, Almey St. John, 225
" Adventures of a Guinea," 161
" Æschylus and Sophocles," 40
" Agincourt," 59
Aguilar, Grace, 273
Ainsworth, W. Harrison, 24, 59-61, 99-100, 148, 169, 170, 225
" Akhnaton," 113
Alison, Sir Archibald, 44, 160, 171
" All Quiet on the Western Front," 22 note
Altsheler, J. A., 272
Andersen, Hans, 53, 95, 204
Andrews, Mrs., 79
" Anne of Geierstein," 50
" Antiquary, The," 161-2
" Apollonius of Tyre," 31
" Apparition of Mrs. Veal, The," 181-2
Ariosto, 165
Armstrong, Anthony, 114
" Arrow of Gold, The," 243
Atherton, Gertrude, 79, 114
Austin, Jane (American), 72

Babcock, W. H., 72, 240
Bacheller, Irving, 79
Bacon, Francis, 272
Bailey, H. C., 139, 255
Baillie, Joanna, 101
Baker, Dr. Ernest, 30, 50, 112
Baldwin, Stanley, 44, 167
Balzac, Honoré de, 197-8, 210, 240
Bandello, 32
" Barbazure," 59, 76
" Bardelys the Magnificent," 139, 255
Baring-Gould, Sabine, 81, 225
Barker, Dr. Ernest, 118
" Barlasch of the Guard," 212
" Barnaby Rudge," 64, 163, 206-7, 253
Barnes, William, 225
Barrie, J. M., 74, 209
Barrington, E., 235, 274
" Barry Lyndon," 64, 198
" Battle Ground, The," 79
Beaconsfield, Lord, 83
" Beaujeu," 255
Bell, Mrs. ("John Travers"), 240, 276
Belloc, Hilaire, 139, 160
" Ben Hur," 72
Bennett, Arnold, 15, 43, 47-8, 120-1, 133, 212-3, 263, 266, 270, 272, 278-89
Bensusan, S. L., 225-6
" Bertrand of Brittany," 140
Besant, Sir Walter, 68, 107, 169, 249, 255
Besant and Rice, 68, 255
Bird, R. M., 41
Birkenhead, Lord, 44
Birrell, Augustine, 12, 204
" Birth of the Gods, The," 113
" Black Arrow, The," 67, 106, 187
" Black Magic," 198
Blackmore, R. D., 65-7, 91-2, 107
Blunden, Edmund, 276
Blyth, James, 139
Boccaccio, 32-3
" Book of the Confession of Asenath, The," 31, 50
Booth, E. C., 279
" Borough-Monger, The," 243
Bowen, Marjorie, 43, 51, 130, 139, 155, 191, 198, 223, 230, 241, 255, 274, 276
Boyle, Roger, 37
Braddon, Miss, 273
Brady, Cyrus T., 212
" Brambletye House," 99
Brebner, Percy, 139
" Bride of Lammermoor, The," 54
" Bridge of San Luis Rey, The," 148, 185
" Brigadier Gerard," 264
" Brook Kerith, The," 114
Broster, D. K., 274
Brown, Charles Brockden, 41, 58, 71, 188
Browne, Sir Thomas, 14, 129
Bryant, W. C., 58

Buchan, John, 15, 19, 24, 144, 285, 287
Buck, Katherine M., 265, 274
Bunyan, John, 36, 223
" By Order of the Company," 255
Byron, Lord, 41

Cable, G. W., 71
Caine, Hall, 107
" Camp of Refuge, The," 166
Canning, A. S. G., 159
" Canterbury Tales, The," 33
Capes, Bernard, 70
" Capitaine Fracasse," 189
" Captain Margaret," 90
" Cardinal's Mistress, The," 281
" Cardinal's Snuff-Box, The," 190
Carlyle, Thomas, 13, 43, 160-1, 233, 251
Carroll, Lewis, 48
" Cassandra," 40
" Castle Inn, The," 137, 196-7
" Castle of Otranto, The," 11, 38-9, 56
" Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne, The," 21
" Catriona," 68, 164, 260-1
" Cavalier, The," 107
Cellini, Benvenuto, 179-80
Cervantes, 14, 35, 73, 163, 238-9
" Chain of Error in Scottish History, The," 158
Chamberlin, Frederic, 170
Chambers, R. W., 79
Champion de Crespigny, Mrs., 139, 255, 274
" Chaplain of the Fleet, The," 68
" Charles Men, The," 70
" Charles O'Malley," 63
" Charterhouse of Parma, The," 68
Chaucer, 33
" Chevalier de Maison Rouge, Le," 84
Chevalley, Abel, 33
" Chronicles of the Canongate," 52
Churchill, Winston (American), 78-9, 172
" Cian of the Chariots," 72
" Claudia Particella," 281
" Cloister and the Hearth, The," 65, 103, 124, 135, 176-80
" Cold Steel," 155
Coleridge, M. E., 70, 91, 194-5, 209
Collodi, C., 199
Colvill, Helen H., 241
Congreve, William, 238
" Conquered, The," 118, 279, 285
Conrad, Joseph, 20, 68, 139, 176, 203, 212, 243
" Contes du Lundi," 265
Cooper, J. Fenimore, 41, 57-9, 71
Coppard, A. E., 265-6
Cosio, Trueba y, 53
Coster, Charles de, 250
Couperus, Louis, 114
" Craft of Fiction, The," 190, 210
" Craft of Literature, The," 180
Crawford, E. Marion, 68, 107
" Crisis, The," 78
Crockett, S. R., 106, 255
" Crossing, The," 78
" Crouchback," 191
" Curé de Tours," 197-8

Danilevski, G. P., 212
Daudet, Alphonse, 265
Dawson, W. J., 157
" Days of Bruce, The," 273
" Decameron," 33
Deeping, Warwick, 140, 255
Defoe, Daniel, 36-7, 181-2
" Delight of Great Books, The," 45
Deloney, Thomas, 33-4, 239
De Morgan, William, 168
" Deuce, The," 136
" Devereux," 62
D'Exiles, Prévost, 40
Dickens, Charles, 26, 64, 81, 83-4, 102, 148, 163, 196-7, 200, 206-7, 243, 252-4, 257, 280-1, 286
Dickinson, G. Lowes, 10
" Dickon," 230, 241
Diver, Maud, 274
" Dombey and Son," 252
" Don Quixote," 35, 73-4, 104, 163, 165, 171, 199, 238-9
" Dorothy Forster," 68, 255
Douglas, James, 150
Doyle, A. Conan, 68, 107, 139, 167, 264
Duke, Winifred, 274
Dumas, Alexander, 16, 18, 20, 51-2, 61, 64, 84, 89, 95-9, 133, 148-9, 165, 219-21, 227
Duse, Eleanora, 180
" Dynasts, The," 69, 173

Ebers, George, 114, 122-3
" Edgar Huntly," 188
Eliot, George, 20, 81, 93-4, 133, 168-9, 210, 227, 274
Emerson, R. W., 191
Erckmann-Chatrian, 16, 69
Erskine, John, 45
Ervine, St. John, 209
Escalante, Amos de, 53
" Esmond," 26, 51-2, 64, 104, 136, 164, 190, 198, 221-2, 281

Espronceda, 53
" Eugénie Grandet," 210
Everett-Green, Evelyn, 274

" Fair Maid of Perth, The," 101
" Fate, The," 59
" Felix Holt," 168-9
Fenn, G. M., 272
Feuchtwanger, Lion, 65-6, 136, 275-7
Fielding, Henry, 57, 63
" Fifth Queen, The," 198, 222, 234
Flaubert, Gustave, 24-5, 101-2, 114, 180, 283
Florio, 223
Fogazzaro, A., 70
Ford, F. M. (F. M. Hueffer), 139, 190, 198, 222, 234, 243
" Foreigner, The," 240, 276
" Forerunner, The," 70, 93, 188-9
" Forest Lovers, The," 191
Forster, E. M., 43, 256-7
" Fortunes of Nigel, The," 54, 208, 219, 233-4
" Forty-Five Guardsmen, The," 96, 219-21
" Foul Play," 103
" Four Sonnes of Aymon, The," 31
France, Anatole, 15, 156, 263
" French Revolution, The," 161
" From Behind the Arras," 139
" From the Memoirs of a Minister of France," 264
Froude, J. A., 156, 159-160

Galsworthy, John, 25, 257, 270
Gardiner, S. R., 160, 230
Garnett, Mrs., 255
Garstin, Crosbie, 140
Garvin, J. L., 279
Gaskell, Mrs., 273
Gautier, Théophile, 189
Gay, Phœbe F., 212-2
" General Crack," 241, 276
" Gesta Romanorum," 32
Gielgud, Val, 212
" Gil Blas," 104
Gilchrist, Murray, 265
" Girondin, The," 139
Gissing, George, 149, 288
Gladstone, W. E., 31, 44
Glasgow, Ellen, 79
Goethe, 22, 41, 49-50
Gogol, N. V., 135
" Golden Roof, The," 139, 276
Goldsmith, Oliver, 104
Gorki, Maxim, 53, 265
" Götz von Berlichingen," 22, 41, 49-50
" Governor of England, The," 130
" Grand Cyrus, The," 37-8
Grant of Laggan, Mrs., 88, 227, 239
Gras, Felix, 212
" Great Expectations," 64
Green, Mrs. J. R., 273
Grier, Sydney C., 274
" Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales, A," 29, 112, 131
Gull, Ranger, 69
Gunnarsson, Gunnar, 136
" Guy Mannering," 46, 239

Haggard, H. Rider, 113-4
" Hard Cash," 103, 169
Hardy, Blanche, 132, 274
Hardy, Thomas, 69, 89, 91, 107, 133, 139, 172-3, 181, 225, 255
Harland, Henry, 190
" Harold," 62, 131, 207-8
Haroun-al-Raschid, 27
Harraden, Beatrice, 274
Harris, Frank, 79
Harrison, Frederic, 168
" Harry Lorrequer," 63
" Harry Revel," 201
Hawkins, Sir A. Hope, 168
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 38, 71, 88-9, 170
Hay, M. V., 158
Hazlitt, William, 44, 56
" Heart of Midlothian, The," 162, 208, 219
Henry, O., 85, 110, 263-4
Henty, G. A., 130, 212, 272
" Hereward the Wake," 90, 131, 166
Hergesheimer, Joseph, 79
" Hetty Wesley," 180, 201
Hewlett, Maurice, 33, 70, 91, 136, 148, 191, 264, 274
Heyer, Georgette, 274
Hilliers, Ashton, 114
Hirst, W. A., 221-2
" Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon," 1, 153-5
Hobbes, John Oliver, 69
Holland Rose, Professor, 160
" Holmby House," 163
Holmes, O. W., 37
" Holy War, The," 36
Homer, 31
Hopkins, Tighe, 287
Horn, Aloysius, 29
" Hostages, The," 119
Howells, W. D., 33, 75
Hueffer, F. M. (F. M. Ford), 139, 190, 198, 222, 234, 243
Hugo, Victor, 19, 23, 58, 81, 91, 109, 152, 155, 164-5, 228, 244, 248, 287
Hume, David, 155

"Humphrey Clinker," 252
"Hypatia," 93, 120, 124

"Il Novellino," 33
"Infamous John Frend, The," 255
"Infidel, The," 273
Inge, Dean, 13, 45, 158, 276
Ingelow, Jean, 92
"Inglesant, John," 66, 107-8
"In High Places," 273
"In King's Byways," 264
"In the Palace of the King," 68
"In the Wilderness," 136
"I Promessi Sposi," 68, 163
Irving, Henry, 28
Irving, Washington, 44
"Island of Dr. Moreau, The," 123
"Israel Potter," 72, 235-7
"Italian, The," 40
"Ivanhoe," 44, 49, 51-2, 54-5, 61, 129, 162, 167, 186, 203, 214-9, 232, 284
"I Will Maintain," 255

"Jack of Newbury," 33-4
Jacobs, W. W., 74, 123
James, G. P. R., 47, 57, 59-61, 106-7, 143, 169
James, Henry, 111
"James the Second," 240
"Jan Stewer," 225
Jensen, Johannes, 114
Jerdan, William, 239, 241
Jerome, Jerome K., 74
Jerrold, Walter, 50
Jesse, Tennyson, 274
"Jew Süss," 65-6, 113, 275-8
"Jinny the Carrier," 225-6
"John Burnet of Barns," 24
Johnson, Brimley, 53
Johnson, Charles, 161
Johnson, Dr. Samuel, 14, 42, 161, 203, 229
"John Splendid," 255
Johnston, Mary, 255, 274
Johnstone, Professor Hilda, 273
Jokai, Maurus, 70
Jones, W. Hughes, 269-70
"Judæus Procurator," 263
Justinian, the Emperor, 32

"Kenilworth," 44, 50, 54, 101, 161-2, 197, 200, 204
Ker, David, 272
"Kidnapped," 67, 90, 101, 105, 223
King, Alice, 112
"King Henry IV.," 35-6
Kingsley, Charles, 90-1, 135, 166, 169, 199, 275, 281
Kingsley, Henry, 124-7
"King with Two Faces, The," 70, 194-5, 209
Kipling, Rudyard, 29, 48, 91, 123, 130, 144, 188, 264-5, 283-4
Knipe, John, 274
"Kristin Lavransdatter," 190

"La Calprenède," 40
La Croix, 98-9
"La Dame de Montsoreau," 96
"La Débâcle," 108
La Fayette, Madame de, 40, 190
Lagerlöff, Selma, 136, 274
"La Gloria de Don Ramiro," 70
Lamartine, 152
Lamb, Charles, 286
Landor, W. S., 14
Lang, Andrew, 51, 151, 238
Lardner, Dr. Dionysius, 10
Larretta, Enrique, 70
"Last Days of Pompeii, The," 62
"Last of the Barons, The," 62, 168, 207, 241
"Last of the Mohicans, The," 57
Latimer, Bishop, 12
"La Tulipe Noire," 255
"Laughing Cavalier, The," 255
"La Vendée," 242
Lazhhétchnikoff, 136
"Le Avventure di Pinocchio," 199
"Le Collier de la Reine," 133, 283
Lee, Sophia, 41
"Legend of Ulenspiegel, The," 250
"Les Deux Fous," 98-9
"Les Misérables," 248, 287
Lever, Charles, 63, 99, 242
Lewis, "Monk," 286
Lewis, Sinclair, 270
"L'Homme qui Rit," 164, 228
"Life of Jack Wilton, The," 34
"Life of Virgilius, The," 31
"Life on the Mississippi," 74
"Lily of Lombardy, The," 241
"Little Duke, The," 280
"Little Minister, The," 209
"Little Novels of Italy," 33, 191, 264
Lloyd George, D., 44
"Lochinvar," 255
Locke, W. J., 107
"Lodging for the Night, A," 28, 261-2
Longfellow, H. W., 111-2
"Lorna Doone," 65-7, 90-2, 130
"Lost Fight, The," 202, 276
"Lost Sir Massingberd, 92-3
Lowell, J. R., 58, 88
Lubbock, Percy, 190
Lyall, Edna, 156
Lytton, Bulwer, 23, 62, 83, 91, 102-4, 168, 172, 190, 207-8, 241, 253

Macaulay, Lord, 12-14, 36, 156, 159
MacCarthy, Desmond, 97
MacFarlane, Charles, 166
MacLaurin, Dr. C., 170-1
Major, Charles, 78
" Major Weir," 261
Malory, Sir Thomas, 31
" Margaret of Valois," 227
" Marietta," 68
" Marius the Epicurean," 120-1
" Markheim," 209
Marmol, José, 70
" Marshal, The," 79
" Martin Valliant," 255
Masefield, John, 90
" Master of Ballantrae, The," 67-8, 105, 164, 200
Maupassant, Guy de, 143, 195
Maurice, F. D., 44, 47
Maurois, André, 140
Maxwell, W. B., 279
" Meaning of Good, The," 10
" Melancholy Hussars, The," 255
Melville, Herman, 72, 235-7
Melville, Whyte, 163
" Memoirs of a Cavalier, The," 37, 181
Mencken, H. L., 243
Meredith, George, 69, 188, 230
Merezhkowsky, D., 70, 93, 113, 188-9, 246-8
Mérimée, Prosper, 32
Merrick, L., 265
Merriman, Seton, 212
Metastasio, 9-10
" Middlemarch," 133
Mikszath, Koloman, 190
Mitchison, Naomi, 118-20, 144, 274, 279
" Monkey's Paw, The," 74
" Monsieur Beaucaire," 254-5
Montagu, Lady M. Wortley, 13
" Monte Cristo," 97
Montgomery, K. L., 261
Moore, Dorothea, 274
Moore, George, 114
Mottram, R. H., 190, 242-3
" Mr. Cleveland," 40
" Mr. Misfortunate," 255
" Mr. Washington," 139
Munro, Neil, 255
Mussolini, Benito, 281
" Mysteries of Udolpho, The," 21, 39, 56
" My Sword for Lafayette," 255

" Napoleon Decrees," 139
Nashe, 33-4
Nepean, Mrs. Evan, 274
Neumann, Alfred, 136
" New Arabian Nights, The," 28, 106, 261-3
Newbolt, Sir Henry, 72, 127-9, 292
" Newcomes, The," 281
" New June, The," 129
Newman, Cardinal, 44
" Nicky Nan, Reservist," 201
Nicoll, Sir William Robertson, 279
Nield, Jonathan, 15, 29, 112, 130-1
" Night and Morning," 102
" Notre Dame," 19, 165, 204, 283, 287
Noyes, Alfred, 279

" Old Country, The," 72, 127-9, 187, 292
" Old Dominion, The," 255
" Old English Baron, The," 56
" Old Margaret," 124-7
" Old Mortality," 54
Oliphant, Mrs., 244
Oman, Carola, 191, 274
Oman, Sir Charles, 151
" On the Face of the Waters," 70, 254
" Orange Girl, The," 68, 255
Orczy, Baroness, 255, 274
" Orlando Furioso," 165
Orleans, Duchess of, 230
Osborn, E. B., 231-2
Ouida, 148
" Our Mr. Dormer," 190, 242-3
" Ovington's Bank," 137
Oxford, Lord, 44

Pain, Barry, 74
Painter, William, 14, 32
Palgrave, Sir Francis, 43
Pardoe, Miss, 273
Parker, Sir Gilbert, 69, 264
" Parthenissa," 37
" Paston Letters, The," 186, 223
Pater, Walter, 120-1
" Pathfinder, The," 59
" Path of the King, The," 144
Paulding, James Kirke, 90
Payn, James, 92-3, 244-5
Peacock, T. L., 42
" Pelham," 62
Pemberton, Max, 212, 255
" Percy Anecdotes, The," 32
" Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, The," 74-5, 121
" Peveril of the Peak," 54
Phelps, Professor Lyon, 243
" Philip," 208
Phillpotts, Eden, 91, 139, 188, 228
" Pilgrim's Progress, The," 36
" Pirate, The," 55, 189

Plunkett, Lord, 14
Poe, E. A., 123, 188, 264
Polevoy, 136
Porter, Jane, 41, 264
Preedy, G. W., 241, 276
Prescott, H. F. M,, 202, 274, 276
Prescott, W. H., 43
Priestley, J. B., 53-4
" Prince and the Pauper, The," 12, 75
" Prince Otto," 161
" Princess of Cleves, The," 40, 190
Procopius, 32
" Progress of Romance, The," 56
" Puck of Pook's Hill," 130, 144, 265, 284

" Quatre-vingt-treize," 244
" Queenhoo Hall," 22
" Queen of the Dawn, The," 113
" Queen's Necklace, The," 133, 283
" Queen's Quhair, The," 136, 191
" Quentin Durward," 54, 157, 163, 195, 282
" Quest of Glory, The," 139
Quiller-Couch, Sir A. T., 91, 139, 175, 180, 200-1, 225, 244, 255, 257
" Quo Vadis," 240

Radcliffe, Mrs., 21, 39-40, 161
Rait, Professor, 158
Raleigh, Sir Walter (critic), 30, 37, 182, 279
Raleigh, Sir Walter (Elizabethan), 155
" Ralpho the Mysterious," 211
Reade, Charles, 65, 89, 103-4, 169, 173, 176-80
" Rebecca and Rowena," 51
" Recess, The," 41
" Redgauntlet," 46, 54, 257-60
Reed, Margaret Baines, 274
Reeve, Clara, 41, 56
Rich, B., 36
" Richard Carvel," 78
" Richard Darlington," 52
" Richard Yea-and-Nay," 70, 136, 191
Richardson, S., 38
" Richelieu," 59
Ridge, Pett, 74, 266
" Rienzi," 62
" Robert Orange," 69
Robertson, William, 155
" Robinson Crusoe," 181
" Rob Roy," 46, 54, 161-2
" Roderick Random," 252
" Rodney Stone," 68
" Romance," 243
" Romance of the Forest," 21
" Romola, 20, 65, 93-4, 227
" Rookwood," 60
Rosa, M. de la, 53
" Rose Brocade, The," 255
Rose-Troup, Mrs. F., 273
Ruskin, John, 14, 32, 44, 47, 56, 228, 251

Sabatini, Rafael, 27, 139, 255
St. Francis, 267-8
" St. Ives," 67, 244
" St. Joan " (Shaw), 165-6
" St. Peter's Umbrella," 190
" St. Ronan's Well," 100
Saintsbury, George, 30, 132-3, 279
" Salammbô," 22, 101, 114
" Sanctuary," 132
Sarasin, J. G., 274
" Scarlet Letter, The," 38, 71, 170
" School for Saints, The," 69
Scott, Sir Walter, 22-3, 25, 37, 41-59, 61, 63, 87-9, 99-104, 107, 113, 129, 132-3, 161-3, 172, 186, 197, 200, 203, 213-9, 227, 233-4, 239-40, 254, 257-60, 274, 284, 286
" Scottish Chiefs, The," 41, 264
Scudéry, Mlle. de, 37
" Seasons, The," 182
Seccombe, Thomas, 113
Seeley, J. R., 49
" Serf, The," 69
" Sevastopol," 246
Shakespeare, 28, 31, 33, 35, 209
Shaw, Bernard, 121-2, 165-6, 214
" Sheppard, Jack," 60
Sheppard, J. T., 40 (note)
" She-Wolves of Machecoul, The," 16
Shiel, M. P., 155
Shorthouse, J. H., 66, 107-8
" Shrewsbury," 137
" Sicilian Romance, The," 21
Sienkiewicz, H., 70, 240
" Sir Charles Grandison," 38
" Sire de Malétroit's Door," 106, 262-3
" Sir John Chiverton," 61, 99
" Sisters, The," 123
Smith, Horace, 100
Smith, Sheila Kaye, 225, 270
Smith, Sydney, 47, 251-2
Smollett, Tobias, 57, 252
Snowden, Keighley, 225
" Sons of the Sword," 140
" Soul of Abe Lincoln, The," 240
" South Sea Bubble, The," 60
Spielhagen, Friedrich, 17
" Splendid Spur, The," 200, 255
" Springhaven," 65
" Spy, The," 57
Stacpoole, H. de V., 144

" Starvecrow Farm," 137
Steel, Mrs. F. A., 70, 254
Steele, Richard, 193, 204
Stephen, Leslie, 16, 43, 93, 133
Sterne, Lawrence, 176
Stevenson, R. L., 23, 25, 45-6, 51, 67-8, 89-91, 101, 104-7, 149, 156, 161, 164, 180, 189, 199, 209, 223, 227, 244, 249, 260-2, 274, 286
" Story of the Stone Age, A," 114, 122-4
Strang, Herbert, 272
" Strange and Wonderful Adventures of Don Simonides," 36
Straparola, Giovan, 32
" Street of the Flute Player, The," 144
Strickland, Miss, 273
Strutt, Joseph, 22, 186
" Study of a Novel, The," 55 (note)
" Surgeon's Daughter, The," 55
" Suspense," 68, 203
Sutcliffe, Halliwell, 225
" Sword Hand of Napoleon, The," 212
" Sylvia's Lovers," 273

Taine, 43, 103
" Taken from the Enemy," 129
" Tale of Two Cities, A," 26, 64, 83-4, 93, 102, 156, 163, 196-7, 200, 253, 280-1
" Tales of Hearsay," 212
" Tales of Time and Space," 123-4
Talfourd, Lord, 43
" Taras Bulba," 135
Tarkington, Booth, 79, 255
" Tavern Knight, The," 139, 255
Tchéhoff, Anton, 265-6
Tennyson, 44, 107
" Tess of the Durbervilles," 172
Thackeray, W. M., 26, 45, 51-2, 61, 64, 104, 136, 169, 172, 205, 208, 221-2, 227, 237, 242-3, 249, 253, 281
Thaddæus of Warsaw, 264
" Thomas of Reading," 33
" Thomas the Rhymer," 22
" Three Musketeers, The," 78, 97-8, 149, 204
Thucydides, 14
" Thunderer, The," 235
" Tiger Dawn," 167
" Tod Lapraik," 260-1
Todd, Dr., 56-7
Tolstoy, 38, 70, 212, 246-8
" Tom Brown's Schooldays," 199
" Tom Burke," 63
" Tom Jones," 63
" To Right the Wrong," 156
" Tour, The," 114
" Tower of London, The," 60
Trapassi, Pietro, 9, 10
Travers, John (Mrs. Bell), 240, 276
" Treasure of Franchard, The," 189
Tree, Sir H. Beerbohm, 167
Trevelyan, G. M., 15
" Tristram Shandy," 176
" Triumph of Youth," 136, 279
Trollope, Anthony, 19, 47, 51, 69, 104, 113, 186, 242
" Trumpet-Major, The," 69, 255
Tucker, Kennedy, 71
Turgeniev, 246-8
" Twain, Mark," 12, 72-8, 121-2, 218
" 'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay," 255
Tynan, Katherine, 274

" Ugly Duchess, The," 113, 213, 275-6, 287
" Under the Red Robe," 137-9, 196
Undset, Sigrid, 136, 190, 274
" Unfortunate Traveller, The," 34
" Unhurrying Chase, The," 202

Valera, Juan, 53
" Vanity Fair," 65, 136, 162, 203, 253
" Verney Memoirs, The," 223
" Vicomte de Bragelonne," 204
Villon, 27
" Viper of Milan, The," 139
" Virginian, The," 79
" Virginians, The," 136, 281
" Vittoria," 69, 188
" Vivandière," 212
Von Heidenstam, Verner, 70
Von Schlegel, 12

Wallace, Lew, 72
Walpole, Horace, 38-40, 56
Walpole, Hugh, 45, 65, 290
" Wandering Willie's Tale," 257-60
" War and Peace," 38, 246-8
Ware, William, 72
" Warrior's Soul, The," 212
Wassermann, Jacob, 136, 279
Watts, Mary S., 79
" Waverley," 16, 22, 41, 45, 49, 54, 65, 101, 113
" Waverley Novels, The," 38, 45, 55, 59, 233
" Wayland-Dietrich Saga," 265
Weigall, Arthur, 158
" Weir of Hermistoun," 67, 107, 233
Wells, H. G., 114, 122-4
" Westward Ho !" (Kingsley), 90-1, 135, 281
" Westward Ho !" (Paulding), 90

Weyman, Stanley, 21, 70, 137-9, 167, 196, 249, 264, 274
Wharton, Edith, 79, 274
Whately, Archbishop, 153-5
" When Knighthood Was in Flower," 78
" When the Bough Breaks," 119-20
" When Valmond Came to Pontiac," 69
Whitcomb, S. L., 55 (note)
" White Company, The," 68
" White Terror, The," 212
Whitman, Walt, 42
Wilde, Oscar, 156
Wilder, Thornton, 148, 185
Wilkins, M. E., 198, 274
Williamson, Kennedy, 198
Williams, W. E., 180
Wister, Owen, 79
Wodehouse, P. G., 264
Woods, M. L., 140
" Woodstock," 51-2, 54, 87-8, 162
Wordsworth, 43
Wynne, May, 140, 274

" Yankee at the Court of King Arthur," 72-8, 122, 218
Yonge, Charlotte, 44, 212, 272-3, 280
" Youth," 176

Zagoskin, 136
Zangwill, Israel, 74, 225-6
" Zenobia," 72
Zola, Emile, 108

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